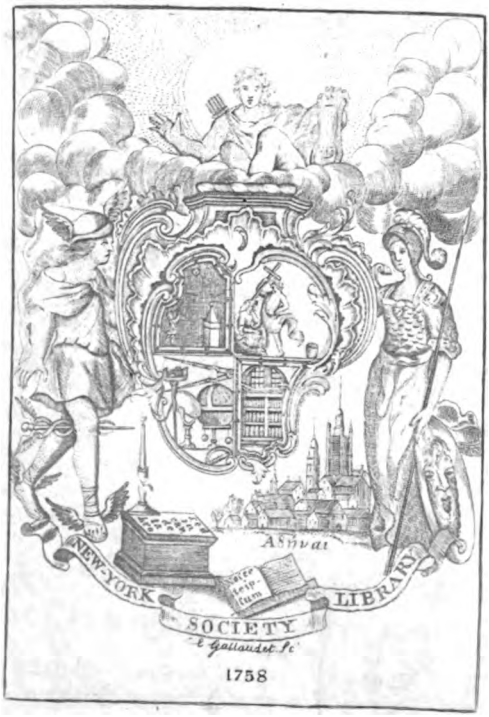
CHRISTIAN REID



THE LIGHT OF THE VISION

THE LIGHT OF THE VISION

L.C. Tiernan.

BY ~~CHRISTIAN REID~~

Author of "Véra's Charge," "Philip's Restitution," "Fairy Gold," "A Child of Mary," etc.

THE AVE MARIA
NOTRE DAME, INDIANA
U. S. A.

c1911
40

TO

REV. DANIEL E. HUDSON, C. S. C.,

IN

REMEMBRANCE OF LONG FRIENDSHIP,

AND

KINDNESS WHICH HAS NEVER FAILED,

THIS STORY

IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

THE LIGHT OF THE VISION

CHAPTER I.

"Oh, here you are, Madeleine,—*at last!* I've been looking for you everywhere!"

The voice—high-pitched always from habit, and particularly high-pitched just now from impatience—echoed strangely through the vast, quiet spaces of the Cathedral of Chartres, and made more than one of the kneeling figures at the different altars turn to see who had spoken in such unseemly fashion, although the language of the speech sufficiently answered the question for those who recognized it.

Indeed there could be no doubt of the nationality of the speaker,—a young woman of the alert bearing, trim, modish dress, and independent assurance of manner, which has come to be known all over the Old World as the distinguishing marks of the daughters of the New. She had paused before another young woman, who was seated in the shadow of one of the great pillars of the nave, an open book in her lap, while her gaze had been lifted, as if in a trance of admiration, toward one of the windows which are the glory of the Cathe-

dral, until, being so unexpectedly and sharply accosted, her eyes fell on the accusing face before her.

"I'm sorry, Nina," she said hastily, in a very different voice from that of the other,—a voice which in its low-toned musical softness was a rebuke for the loud utterance it answered. "I thought you knew where I had gone. I asked Madame Réville to tell you."

"She *did* tell me." (Involuntarily the speaker lowered her own tone.) "She said you had gone to the Cathedral,—although, of course, I should have known that. You seem as distracted about the Cathedral as *he* is" (a disparaging glance was cast at the book in the other's lap); "but you quite forget the size of the building. I have been wandering about, looking for you for two hours at least."

"Now, Nina!"

"Well, of course I haven't been exactly looking all that time: I've stopped occasionally to do some sketching; but I've kept a weather eye out for you, and it's only by merest accident that I have stumbled upon you at last in this dark corner. What on earth have you been doing?"

Madeleine Raynor looked down with a smile at the open page of the book in her lap.

"I have been trying," she said, "to see with Huysmans' eyes a small part of what he saw from this place—I believe I've found the

very place,—and so wonderfully described. You remember the description of his coming here to the Cathedral in the early morning before it was light, and of the breaking of day through these marvellous windows? I was determined that I would witness the daily miracle as he did; and I have. It has been like a dream, a vision of faith."

The girl, still standing before her, regarded her curiously.

"But why," she queried, "was it necessary to come here at so unearthly an hour to witness this vision? I should think that the symbolism as well as the beauty of the windows, could best be seen when there is a full light on them."

"Yes," Madeleine agreed, "they can best be seen in a full light. But the poetical mysticism which arranged them so that every dawn is a gradual revelation of the whole scheme of Christian symbolism, can best be appreciated by witnessing the dawning of the light. It is an effect of which one could never have dreamed, and which only genius allied to faith could have conceived. Listen to this."

And, in tones so low that they could not be heard even a few paces distant, yet which were perfectly audible to her companion, she read eagerly:

"'The genius of the Middle Ages devised the skilful and pious lighting of this edifice, and harmonized the ascending march of day

to some extent with its windows. It seemed as though the sun, as it mounted higher, followed the growth of the Virgin,—taking its birth in the window where she was still a babe, in that northern transept, where St. Anne, her mother, sat between David, the king of the golden harp, and Solomon, the bearer of the blue-lilied sceptre,—each against a background of purple, to prefigure the royal birth of the Son: between Melchizedek, the mitred patriarch holding the censer, and Aaron, in the curious red cap bordered with lemon yellow, representing prophetically the priesthood of Christ. And at the end of the apse there was another Mary,—triumphant, looking down the sacred grove, supported by figures from the Old Testament and by St. Peter. It was she again who in the south transept faced St. Anne,—she, now a woman and herself a mother, amid four enormous men bearing on their shoulders four smaller figures; these were the four greater prophets, who had foretold the coming of the Messiah—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel,—bearing the four Evangelists, and thus expressing the parallelism of the Old and New Testaments, and the support given by the Old Covenant to the New.' "

The reader paused, and Nina Percival nodded as she glanced around.

"They are all here," she said; "but I don't understand why you had to come so early to see them."

"You don't understand how they were gradually unveiled by 'the march of day,' like a series of great symbolic pictures, as they are? Let me read you a bit—just one bit—more!

"'As it reached the chancel,'" she went on, "'the light came in through brighter and clearer colors,—through the blue of translucent sapphires, through pale rubies, brilliant yellow and crystalline white. The gloom was relieved beyond the transepts near the altar. Even in the centre of the cross (of nave and transepts) the sun pierced clearer glass, less storied with figures, and bordered with almost colorless panes that admitted it freely. At last in the apse, forming the top of the cross, it poured in,—symbolical of the light that flooded the world from the top of the Tree. And the pictures were diaphanous, just lightly covered with flowing lines and aerial tints, to frame in a sheaf of colored sparks the image of a Madonna, less hieratic than the others; and a fairer Infant, blessing the earth with uplifted hand.'"

Madeleine paused again, and looked up at her companion with a soft, deep sigh.

"It was divinely beautiful to the eye and thrilling to the soul," she said. "They were not only geniuses, but poets and saints, the men who arranged that wonderful effect, to be repeated every day. Come with me tomorrow to see it!"

But Nina shook her head.

"No, thank you!" she replied. "This is quite good enough for me. And now don't you think you have been here long enough? *I* think it is time to get out into the sunshine."

Madeleine rose from her seat with evident reluctance.

"It never seems 'long enough,' the time I have spent here," she said wistfully. "I think I could stay all day without tiring; but no doubt it is well to get into the sunshine. But isn't the Cathedral glorious now?"

"It is always glorious as a work of art," Nina agreed,—"the queen of all the great French cathedrals, without doubt."

Madeleine did not quote again from the book she carried; but a passage on which she had been dwelling when Nina first accosted her returned to her memory, as she once more glanced around before leaving the church:

"The sheltering forest had vanished with the darkness. The tree trunks remained, but rose with giddy flight from the ground, unbroken pillars to the sky, meeting at a vast height under the groined vault. The forest was seen as an immense church blossoming with roses of fire, pierced with glowing glass, crowded with Virgins and Apostles, patriarchs and saints."

The sunshine of which Nina had spoken lay broadly over the open square before them as they emerged from the great portal of the

Cathedral. By one accord (for each was well acquainted with the wishes and thoughts of the other) they turned out of the *place*, and followed one of the narrow, picturesque streets that wind about the hill on which the Cathedral stands, to the banks of the river that flows around the city. These curious mediæval byways had been full of delight to the wanderers from the New World ever since they discovered them; and they never exhausted their charm. Hardly more than alleys, they descend in series of steps to the water's edge; and the two who now rapidly went down their breakneck steeps soon found themselves on a boulevard, planted with trees, which took the place of the old ramparts, and below which one branch of the Eure flows in the ancient moat. Above them was a sky of the silvery blue that hangs over Northern France; and about them an air which had in it a touch of autumn crispness that, together with the yellowing foliage, showed the passing of summer and the decline of the year.

"It's a delightful old place, and full of inspiration for an artist, though not wildly exciting," Nina remarked, as they paced along the boulevard, under the shade of the trees. "I'm certainly obliged to you for bringing me here, Madeleine; but I wonder what made you think of it. So few Americans care to leave Paris long enough to find out what French life is like in the provincial cities."

"I'm surprised that you wonder," Madeleine answered. "I thought you knew that it was this book of Huysmans', 'La Cathédrale,' which brought me here. I should never have thought of Chartres but for it."

"It's an odd book," Nina observed, with a glance at the volume the other was carrying,—"as odd as the author must have been. How did it ever come under your notice?"

"It didn't 'come under my notice,' if by that you mean that there was any accident about the matter. After I read 'En Route' I couldn't be satisfied until I had seen this."

"'En Route'! And what is *it* about? *En Route*—where?"

"Don't you know,—can't you guess?" Madeleine lifted her eyes to the great mass of the Cathedral, dominating from its exalted height the dwellings piled about it, as religion dominates human life. "Why, from unbelief to faith, of course,—to all that glorious church yonder typifies."

"I might have guessed as much," Nina assented. She walked on meditatively for a moment, and then said: "I understand what Huysmans meant,—to what place he was *en route;* but I don't understand what put you on the same road. For many reasons, it's the last on which I should have expected to find you."

There was another brief interval of silence, and then Madeleine asked in her low voice,

which always seemed to hold a pathetic minor strain:

"Why is it the last road on which you would have expected to find me?"

Nina turned round upon her.

"Why do you want me to say what you must know?" she demanded. "The religion that church typifies is a bondage to any one, but it would be particularly a bondage to a woman in your position."

"Meaning—?"

"Your position as a divorced woman, of course; for you know—everybody knows—that the Catholic Church doesn't recognize divorce, and therefore would consider you as still bound, instead of free—as you are!"

"Yes," Madeleine answered quietly, "I know that very well. I learned it before I ever read 'En Route,' or thought of travelling the same road myself."

"Then how" (Nina's tone grew vehement now) "could you ever think of travelling such a road? How could you be attracted by a religion that denies your right to make a new life for yourself, and would doom you to loneliness for the sin of another,—to suffer through no fault of your own? That is what I can't understand."

"I suppose not," Madeleine said in the same quiet tone. "But you see life is so ordered that in a hundred ways one must suffer for the sins of others, and pay as heavily for mis-

takes as for crimes. This being a universal law, why should an exception be made for marriage alone? As soon as I began to think on the subject, I saw that quite plainly. And then, as for the religion,—the question is not whether it is an easy religion which accommodates itself to human weakness, but whether in its hardness it is true. If it is true, we have no choice but to obey its laws, however heavily they bear upon us; for—do you remember?—'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"

"But you can't believe that the Catholic Church alone has the words of eternal life?"

"Yes." It was gentle, but very firm, the affirmation. "I believe it. I, too, have been *en route* for some time, but I have reached my destination at last. My journey has ended here, in this wonderful Cathedral of Chartres, which more completely than any other church on earth is dedicated to the Mother of God. You know how I have always longed for a mother? Well, at last I have found one,—more perfect than any of my dreams,—in *her*."

"I see how it is," Nina said. "You are a dreamer—you always have been,—and you are fascinated by the cult of the Virgin, which seems to fill the need you have always felt. But, Madeleine, an imaginary mother will not make your heart less lonely, if you really take the irrevocable step of becoming a Catholic."

"An imaginary mother, no," Madeleine replied. "But there is nothing imaginary about her; and to know her certainly makes my heart less lonely. O Nina, if you could only comprehend how fully she fills the need of which you speak! And it seems to me that it could not have been wholly accidental that the yearning for a mother, which made me sob myself to sleep as a little child, has led me to her feet by a way I could never have foreseen."

Nina cast a keen glance on her.

"I've felt all along that there was something strange behind the change in you," she said. "You might as well tell me about it."

"I am quite willing to tell you," Madeleine answered; "only I doubt if I can make you understand. But let us sit down, and I will try."

They found a bench, in the mellow sunshine under the yellowing trees; and there, with the old cathedral-crowned city rising above them, and the river flowing through the ancient moat at their feet, Madeleine told her story.

"You left America about the time that I obtained my divorce," she said; "but you know how terrible the last year of my life with George Raynor was, and how absolutely it seemed to kill in me all power not only to enjoy, but even to feel anything. I was like one dead while yet alive; and when at last the weight fell from me, and I was told that I was free, I asked myself what I could

possibly do with my life. I was conscious of only one desire: to get away from every association of the past, to sever every link, to put it away as if it had never been, and to begin a new existence. So I went to one of those quiet old Southern towns, where people mind their own business better perhaps than anywhere else in the world; and the whole atmosphere, physical and social, soothed me and helped me to feel again as if I were alive. The people were very kind to me, and after a while I fell in love—"

"Ah!" It was an exclamation of keener interest from Nina, as she suddenly lifted herself in her seat. Madeleine glanced at her with a faint smile.

"With a woman," she continued. "You know what an immense capacity for love I've always had, and that I have never had any one to spend it on, though I tried hard—ah, how hard!—to spend it on George. But he flung it carelessly back to me; and then the old cry of the heart awakened, and I found myself saying over and over, 'If only I had a mother! Mothers don't deceive, forsake and betray.' And, like every one else, I suppose, who has such a yearning, I had even as a little child formed an ideal of a mother, to which my fancy persistently clung, but which I never saw realized until I met the woman of whom I have spoken."

Madeleine paused for a moment; and then,

with hands lightly clasped in her lap as she gazed straight before her, went on in the tone of one who recalls a mental picture:

"She was an altogether exquisite creature; a beautiful woman in the maturity of life,—such maturity as comes only to the woman who has always been sheltered, admired and loved; and as beautiful in character as in person. I have never seen in any one else such charming gentleness and dignity combined. I used to watch her as a lover watches his mistress, and think how happy it would make me to have her as a mother. And then an unexpected thing happened—her son fell in love with me."

"Oh!" It was another involuntary exclamation from Nina. "And did you fall in love with *him?*"

"Not exactly, perhaps; but I liked him very much, and I knew that I could easily grow to love him—which is a better thing than 'falling in love.' He was the kind of man you felt you could be safe with—honest and true, and passionately devoted to me. Yet even his devotion might not have touched me—my heart seemed so dead—if it had not been for his mother. But the thought of her was irresistible; and I finally promised to take his suit under consideration, saying to myself that I would marry him if I were assured of his mother's approval. The day after I promised this she came to see me."

"Well?" Nina waited some time before she uttered this interrogation; but Madeleine's voice had dropped over her last words with a tone of finality; and since she did not resume her story, it seemed necessary to remind her that it was unfinished. "What then?"

"Then," the quiet voice took up its thread, "I had the keenest disappointment of my life. She had come, that lovely woman, to tell me that she could never approve a marriage between her son and myself."

"Why not?" The question was sharp with indignation.

"For a reason she had no more power to change than I—because she was a Catholic, and so also was her son."

"Yet *he*—"

"Yes, he was ready to forget his Faith for me. But she made me comprehend what a dreadful thing it would be if I allowed him to do this. She was as kind as possible, but her words were terrible in their illuminating power. It was as if an angel with a flaming sword stood in my path, and bade me follow that way only at the peril of worse suffering than I had ever known before."

"I don't understand you in the least," Nina broke out. "In my opinion you are talking utter nonsense. If the man loved you, and was ready to forget his tyrannical religion for you, why on earth shouldn't you have married

him and been happy, whether his mother liked it or not?"

"I was afraid that I couldn't make you understand," Madeleine said. "Yet—you've known me for a long time—tell me, do you think I could have been happy after I once realized that I had made myself an instrument to lead a man downward rather than upward, to stand as an immovable barrier between his soul and the things in which he had faith, though he had flung them aside for me?"

"No," Nina answered reluctantly. "Being what you are, I am sure you could not have been happy if you really believed anything of the kind. But why should you have believed it? That is what puzzles me."

"It would not puzzle you if you were able to see things as a Catholic sees them; but, since you can't, you must just believe that I saw them, as a man sees a precipice by a flash of lightning, when they were showed to me by the woman who said—quite truly, I'm sure—that she was trying to save me as well as her son from a great mistake."

"I shouldn't have believed *that*."

"Oh, yes, you would, if you had heard her! No one could have doubted her sincerity. I wish I could give you an idea of her tone, as she uttered some words I can never forget. I had said that if I married her son I would renounce no higher allegiance, that for me it would be 'all pure gain'; and she answered:

'Even for you it will not be all pure gain; for you, too, will shut yourself out from things higher and nobler than earthly happiness. I would think it useless to say this to you,' she added, 'if there were no capability for those higher things in you. But I am sure that at some time, now or in the future, you will want *the best*,—want it as you have wanted human love; want it perhaps when human love breaks like an overtaxed rod under the weight you cast upon it. And if when that time comes you have bound yourself as well as another to the lower life—' "

Madeleine stopped, even as the woman whose words she was repeating had stopped at that point, and gazed at her companion with large eyes full of startled light.

"Nina," she said, "when I heard that I shuddered; for I felt that I should be ready to die if the day ever came when I knew that I had bound myself as well as another to the lower life, and deprived myself forever of freedom to find and follow the best,—that best which I have always so ardently, yet so vaguely desired!"

"You poor child!" Nina laid her hand with a quick pressure of sympathy on one of the slender hands of the other. "I see just how it was. If that cruel woman had known you for a hundred years, she couldn't have played upon your peculiar nature better."

"Don't call her a cruel woman!" Madeleine

protested. "She was anything rather than that. She was not only gentleness itself to me, she not only saved me from what would have been a terrible mistake, but she was ready to do it at the cost of her own happiness."

"Of her happiness?"

"Yes; for when in my pain I cried out that it was easy for her to preach renunciation to others, since there was no necessity for anything of the kind in her own life—since everything had always been made easy for her, and she was even then about to marry a man who had been devoted to her for years,—she told me that she had made an offering of her happiness to save her son; that she had determined not to marry the man who loved her and whom she loved, if by this sacrifice she could save her son from marrying me."

"What mystical nonsense!"

"I suppose it seems so to you," Madeleine answered; "and I don't deny that it seemed so to me at first. But after she was gone her words stayed with me; I could not forget what she had said; and presently I wandered out, and my steps were led—yes, led, I truly believe—to a Catholic church. I was not in the least familiar with Catholic churches, so it was all strange to me; but I sat down to rest, being even more tired in spirit than in body. I don't remember many details. It was near sunset; there were on the altar of

Our Lady some lilies that filled the church with fragrance; and, although it was a poor little place, it seemed later, as the dusk deepened, and the starlike light of the sanctuary lamp came out, to open like a vestibule into something too great and splendid to describe in words."

Madeleine paused again; and something in the modulations of her expressive voice, which hinted of things indescribable, held her companion silent, with a strange sense of awe, until she presently resumed:

"It was like the light of a vision too marvellous for speech. I seemed suddenly to understand the meaning of a phrase that Mrs. Maitland had used. 'If you want to gain any great favor from Heaven,' she said, 'pay in the coin of sacrifice.' In the vision of which I speak, that coin was as if it were held before me. 'With it you can gain all that you vaguely long for,' I appeared to be told. And then—well, then I determined that I would pay at once, so that no one else should suffer through or for me; and that I might perhaps gain all that I seemed to perceive without understanding in the wonderful illumination which had come to my soul. When I left the church, I hurried home, where I wrote two letters—one to the mother and one to the son,—and the next morning early I went away, leaving no address."

"Madeleine! What a shameful thing to do!

You were as cruel to the man as his mother had been to you."

Madeleine smiled slightly.

"I should be quite willing to be as cruel as that," she said; "but, in fact, I was no more cruel to him than she to me. I saved him from a great mistake, and I left no loophole for hope that I would ever change."

"How miserable you must have been!"

"In a certain sense I was. Loneliness came down over me like a dark pall; and if I had not been sustained by the memory of the vision of which I have spoken, I don't know what desperate thing I might not have done. But in my misery I began to haunt Catholic churches and read Catholic books; and, as things grew clearer, and life more endurable, I remembered you, over here in Paris; and I thought I should like to join you—"

"And see the Cathedral of Chartres!"

"I won't deny that the Cathedral had something to do with drawing me, after I read this wonderful book of Huysmans'; but you had most, Nina. I remembered how fond we were of each other in our childhood; I knew you were here alone, pursuing your art studies; and I thought we might, for a time at least, lead a pleasanter life together than we could apart."

"So we could, so we have, so we will!" Nina exclaimed, turning impulsively to kiss the cheek beside her. "It was dear of you

to come to me, and I have enjoyed your companionship so much that I don't even mind playing second fiddle to the Cathedral of Chartres. But, Madeleine, I would be willing to give up your companionship to see you happy."

Madeleine lifted her eyes again to the great church above them.

"I am happy now," she said gently.

CHAPTER II.

It was quite true. As Madeleine explained to the friend whom she had crossed the ocean to join, the light of the wonderful vision which came to her soul when, in her tired misery, she crept into the little Catholic church far away in the New World, had never faded altogether, however much it might occasionally have been dimmed by human weakness, until it led her to the feet of Notre Dame de Chartres, where all things were at last made clear, and seen in their true proportions. And, in the joy of the peace which came to her then—the peace of one who reaches a safe haven after long tossing in stormy waters,—it did not occur to her to wonder where the light so strangely given might yet lead her, what struggles between nature and grace were yet awaiting her, and what blood-stained coin of sacrifice she might yet be called upon to pay. It is frequently so with us: there comes a lull in the long strife with trouble and temptation, and we fancy that it is a lasting truce; we lay down our arms, forgetting that there is no final victory on earth, and that the reward of one sacrifice more often than not is the demand for another.

Happily enough, this is veiled from the eyes of those who are tasting the sweetness of what is known as the first fervor after conversion,—the ineffable reward for that which has generally cost a hard struggle with the forces which the world and the devil array against such a step. And so they go lightly forward, dreaming that all need of combat is over, until suddenly they find themselves again encompassed with foes, and the cry of battle sounding louder than ever in their ears.

So it was with Madeleine. After a life which, although short, had known almost every sorrow, except those which spring from material privation, and especially the sorrow of the heart's betrayal and desolation, she was now for the first time able to declare herself happy. For the first time the mind that had questioned so long and so hopelessly that riddle of man's life and fate, to which faith alone can give the key, was satisfied; and, as it was written of her in another place (only now it might be said with fuller meaning), she had found the "way leading to the fair and wonderful things for which she had longed all her life,—love that would not torture, service in which the eager heart might spend itself, the deep meaning of pain, the divine sweetness which is in sacrifice."

And it was a proof of the generosity of God's dealings with the souls which seek Him single-heartedly—those who count no

worldly loss as worth consideration in the great gain of finding Him in the Church He has founded—that this happiness and peace filled her soul before she was in reality a member of that Church. Here in Chartres the last doubt had fled, the mind had given its fullest assent, and the soul surrendered to the claims which faith made upon it. But the practical step of entering the Church remained yet to be taken. It is a step which timidity often renders difficult to those who have never come much into contact with Catholics and Catholic priests; and this timidity was intensified in Madeleine's case by the fact that she was among strangers in a foreign country.

As she lingered day after day in the great Cathedral, which fascinated her as it had fascinated the man whose book she carried as a *vade mecum*, she watched with wistful envy the figures stealing in and out of the confessionals, or, with a deeper envy yet, those who approached the altars for Holy Communion at Mass. "'I am the living Bread that came down from heaven,'" she found herself murmuring at such times, with a great longing in her heart. But she could not summon sufficient resolution to approach one of these priests, to whom she was utterly unknown, with the great barrier of a language which she indeed understood, but could not speak with fluency, between them. "I must wait until I return to Paris, where I can find an English-

speaking priest," she thought; and meanwhile it seemed happiness enough to taste the sweetness of the peace which filled her soul, and to absorb the atmosphere of the great church she had learned to love so well. It must be added, however, that these things in themselves would not have detained her from returning to Paris and seeking such a priest, as she desired, if Nina, who had begun a picture of a corner of the Cathedral, in which she was intensely interested, had not thrown all her influence against leaving Chartres at this time.

"Wait until I finish my picture!" she pleaded. "It can't make a bit of difference to you: you've all your life in which to find a priest and take the suicidal step you are contemplating. But I have only just the present time in which to do this work; and I believe it is going to be the best thing I've ever done. I came to Chartres to oblige you. When I did not care about coming at all; and now I think you might stay a little longer to oblige me."

This was a plea which Madeleine was altogether unable to resist.

"Of course I will stay," she said. "I am as interested in the picture as you are. And remember that it is to be mine, after it comes back from the Salon."

Nina laughed. "I fancy it will come back from the Salon very promptly," she said.

"I'm sure it will not," Madeleine returned. "It will be accepted, and hung well, and much

admired, and you will have many offers for it, and I shall outbid them all."

"That will be easily done," Nina assured her. "But, all question of the Salon aside," she added, "I do want to finish it while the light is good—you've no idea how short and dark the days become here a little later,—and while the fit of work is on me. It isn't, you know, as if a short time would be sufficient for your business in Paris; else we might run up for a few days and come back—"

But Madeleine shook her head at this tentative suggestion.

"I can't tell how long it will take for what you call my business," she said; "but I must be able to give all my time and all my thoughts to it, and so no running up to Paris for a few days would do. I must wait until we go back and settle for the winter. Meanwhile I'm very happy here, studying the Cathedral with such an interpreter as Huysmans; and you must certainly finish your picture before we move."

"It's lovely of you to be so obliging," Nina declared; "and I do think it will be such a souvenir of the place as you will like to keep."

In this way the matter was settled; and for some time the pleasant, tranquil days went on for the two who, despite certain differences of temperament and taste, were so congenial to each other. As Nina painted at her picture, Madeleine wandered about the noble edifice,

with its forest of pillars, its springing roof and marvellous windows, tracing out by the aid of her interpreter the mediæval science of symbolism, of which it is the most complete example now existing; or sat for hours in happy restfulness of soul and body, at the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar.

But we are never allowed to forget very long that tranquillity is not the condition of mortal life, and suddenly one day this peaceful calm was rudely broken. At first the disturbance seemed both slight and temporary—merely the intrusion of a party of English-speaking tourists into the great church. As a rule, tourists did not come very often to Chartres; and those who came were generally brought there by the fame of the Cathedral—artists, or people of artistic taste and culture who, as Nina briefly put it, "knew how to behave themselves decently." But the first sound of the voices which one morning fell on her ear told Madeleine that the group which now entered did not belong to that class. Loud speech, punctuated with laughter, shrill tones of women, and equally unmodulated voices of men, indicated not only want of reverence, and lack of the breeding which dictates at least the appearance of this grace, but the unmistakable fact that these were Transatlantic visitors.

Shrinking in every fibre, Madeleine fled hastily to a dusky corner, found a chair, and

turned her back on the approaching party, so as neither to see nor to be seen; for, of all things, she least desired recognition by any chance American acquaintance. Under the vast arches, full of the quiet of ages, the loud voices seemed to her fancy to pursue and envelop her in waves of dreadful sound. She could hear now distinctly what they were saying; and then—it was as if a hand suddenly clutched her heart, forcing it to stand still, as she recognized one voice which she could never mistake, since its every accent was branded on her memory as if with fire, carrying ineffaceable recollections of brutality and insult; for it was the voice of the man from whom the law had divorced her. An overpowering sense of something like faintness rushed over her. But she seized with both hands a railing which was near her; and, so clinging, sat motionless as a statue.

"I don't see why we should waste time in here!" the rough voice was saying. "All these old churches are alike; and who cares anything about them now, anyway?"

"A few people seem to care about them still," a woman's high, careless voice, with a note of contempt in it, replied. "And they are supposed to be worth seeing, if only as works of art. But of course one wouldn't expect *you* to consider that."

"No, I don't pose as caring for things I know nothing about," the rude tones retorted.

"I leave that to people like you. Just now I've had as much of this gloom and stained glass and ecclesiastical rubbish as I can stand. I'm going back to the hotel, and try to hurry up lunch, so we can get on. Barclay, hadn't you better come with me? If you're honest, you'll admit that you've had as much of this as you care for, and a smoke in the sunshine will be a great relief."

"Oh—er—I find it quite interesting!" another masculine voice, not without a shade of hesitation and regret, made answer. "I'll stay with the ladies, thanks! We've done only about half the building; and, since we're here, we might as well see all that there is to be seen,—don't you think so, Miss Anderson?"

"Dear me, yes!" (It was a youthful feminine treble that spoke now.) "Let us take it all in while we are about it. As Mr. Raynor says, they are distressingly alike, these old cathedrals; but one doesn't want to be obliged to say that one didn't even look at them. Besides, they told us at the hotel that we couldn't get lunch for an hour; so what else is there to do in the interval?"

"Nothing," answered Mr. Barclay, promptly; "so that settles it. You can go, Raynor, and hurry up things if you can, while we finish our scamper around the Cathedral. That's the best arrangement—eh, Mrs. Raynor?"

"Quite so," replied the same high, careless feminine voice, with the same suggestion of

contempt in it, that had spoken first. "Anything that sets Mr. Raynor free to see about luncheons instead of looking at cathedrals is certainly to be desired. But I believe I'll let you and Laura do the rest of the scampering by yourselves, while I sit down here and wait for you. When you are ready to leave, you can come for me."

Apparently there was no objection to such an arrangement on the part of the two thus dismissed. After slight, perfunctory remonstrance, they wandered away, still talking and laughing audibly; and Madeleine, without turning her head, was aware that, with a rustle of silken skirts, the woman whom she had just heard addressed by her own name sat down in a chair near her. There was a silence, in which she was vividly conscious that a keen glance was taking in every detail of her dress and appearance; and presently what she instinctively dreaded occurred.

"Excuse me!" the woman said abruptly. "But aren't you an American?"

Madeleine started at the sudden sound of the question; and a wild desire to deny her nationality seized her so strongly that she hesitated perceptibly before she answered, without lifting her eyes, and in a tone which conveyed no encouragement for further speech:

"Yes, I am an American."

"I thought so," the other remarked, altogether ignoring the cool remoteness of manner

and tone. "When one has been abroad long, one learns to tell an American woman at a glance; we dress so much better than English-women, and yet we don't look like the French."

A pause; and, since this drew forth no reply of any kind, the questioner proceeded: "Have you been here long?"

Madeleine turned now and looked at her. What she saw was a person whose nationality could not, indeed, have been even for a moment a matter of doubt; for she was as true a type as it was possible to be,—the type of American women whose extravagance and love of luxury have made them a byword of the world; whose god is fashion; whose cult, the care of the body and the worship of their own beauty. For beautiful they frequently are; though it is too often merely the beauty of a highly-groomed animal, exquisitely "turned out" at every point. So it was with this woman now. Her burnished bronze hair shone like silk, her rose-leaf skin spoke of ceaseless care, her dress was perfect in every appointment of style, and only her eyes struck a discordant note in the picture of complete material satisfaction and seductiveness which she presented. But out of these eyes, cold and bright as they were, something looked—perhaps a human heart, or an immortal soul, that had grown sick from feeding on husks, and now regarded life with a weary disgust it would fain have disowned.

A sense of pity, as unexpected as it was

sudden, seized Madeleine when she met those eyes. After all—as she knew well,—who on earth was more to be pitied than the woman who filled the position of George Raynor's wife? It did not matter that this woman had gained that position through arts which set at defiance all laws of morality, and that it was to her influence over the man's already evil nature that Madeleine owed some of the bitterest memories that had poisoned her young life. She read clearly in those unconsciously revealing eyes the old story—that forbidden fruit turns to ashes in the eating, and that the selfishness which ignores the rights of another becomes in the end its own worst punishment.

All this, which it has taken many words to express, she saw in the swiftness of a single glance; and it made her answer the question which had been asked with more of gentle courtesy than she might otherwise have been able to display.

"I have been in Chartres several weeks, if that is what you mean," she said.

Something in her tone, gentle though it was, conveyed a rebuke which the other was quick to understand.

"I beg your pardon!" she replied. "I suppose you think such direct questioning very rude. And so it is. Although I really have some manners, I occasionally forget them—when my nerves are on edge."

"It is," said Madeleine, with the same gentle aloofness, "easy to forget things when the nerves are on edge."

"You don't look as if yours ever could be," the other observed, with a long stare at the face turned toward her. "Now, that is very rude again," she added. "Personal remarks are as ill-bred as direct questions, aren't they? But you look as if you knew nothing whatever about irritated nerves or any other form of trouble."

"Do I?" Madeleine's lips curved into a faint smile. "I am glad of that."

"Why?" the other asked, still watching her curiously.

"Because it is well, from every point of view, to show what one suffers as little as possible; and so one is helped to endure and perhaps to forget things for which there is no remedy."

"That's a philosophy for which I don't care at all," the woman said brusquely. "I was never one for enduring things: I'm always for finding out a remedy for what I don't like."

"But there are some things for which there is no remedy; and then, whether one likes it or not, one must endure them."

"I don't believe that there is anything, short of mortal illness and death, for which one can't find a remedy, if one is determined to do so."

"But there are remedies worse than the things cured."

"Are there?" The speaker paused a moment, and seemed to reflect. "I was about to declare that I'm not acquainted with them," she said then; "but I believe I am. I think you are right. But I wonder how you found out these things? You look so—serene, I imagine is the word—that it's impossible to think that you've learned them from experience."

"We must all learn them from experience," Madeleine told her quietly. "The question is only whether or not we will consent to be taught."

"And suppose one won't consent,—suppose one has made up one's mind not to submit to anything a minute longer than the remedy for it can be found, no matter what the consequences may be to oneself or to anybody else?"

Madeleine regarded her silently for an instant before she answered. There was no mistaking the reckless misery in the eyes, or the defiant self-will of the tone; and compassion gave an added gentleness to her voice when she replied:

"I should be very sorry for any one who felt like that; for those who don't bend must be broken. "

"By whom?" The interrogation was short and sharp.

"By the Divine Power that rules the world and orders our lives."

"You believe that?" A scornful laugh rang strangely in the quiet of the great church. "I might believe in a diabolical power that rules the world, but never in a divine one."

"There is reason to believe in both," Madeleine said, as she rose; "and, whether we will or no, we must serve one or the other. Now I will bid you good-morning!"

"No, no!" Involuntarily as it seemed, the woman put out her hand and caught Madeleine's skirt before she could move away. "Don't go! I—I've some other questions I'd like to ask you. For instance, what attraction do you find to keep you in a dead-alive place like Chartres?"

"I find an attraction, which I am afraid you will hardly comprehend, in this Cathedral."

"In this Cathedral!" The tone was equally astonished and incredulous. "Of course it's very fine—I know enough to know that,—but one could see it all in a day. *We*" (a mocking glance indicated a pair of distant figures) "expect to see it in an hour."

"It is possible to see it in an hour," Madeleine replied; "but it would not be possible to exhaust it in a lifetime."

"But why?"

"You would have to believe in many things of which you know nothing now—especially in the Divine Power you have just denied—before I could answer that question."

"But I'm really curious about it," the other persisted. "And won't you tell me what your name is? We're both Americans, and we may have friends in common."

Madeleine now drew her skirt from the detaining grasp with a decided gesture.

"I am quite certain that we have no friends in common," she said; "and my name does not matter at all. Again, good-morning!"

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Madeleine released herself and walked swiftly away from the woman with whom she had been so strangely brought into contact, the sense of faintness which had seized her before, returned almost overpoweringly; and she had time only to enter the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, and there sink into one of the low chairs near the altar, before blackness closed around her.

Yet she did not altogether lose consciousness; for it was more a spiritual than a physical condition. Material objects were indeed blotted out for a moment—even the light which told of the mystical Presence in the tabernacle,—but a deeper darkness seemed to envelop her soul. Passionate anger rose within her like a torrent; passionate rebellion against the fate that had marred her life; passionate disgust and revolt at the thought that she was in reality still the wife of the man the mere sound of whose voice filled her with shuddering horror, and who had given her place to another woman. Her unexpected pity for that woman did not lessen the sense of degradation which contact with her had roused,—the degradation which a high pure nature feels in

being dragged, however involuntarily, into connection with things base and unworthy. And this intrusion into her life of people whom she had vainly thought to put away from her memory and forget, brought not only a resurgence of all the hideous memories of the past, but also an intense realization of her true position, under which her soul seemed to sink in helpless, rebellious despair. It was as if an infernal voice was whispering to her: "You thought yourself free, and you are bound—bound by a tie which nothing can break, to all you most abhor. And *that* is what your new faith has brought you!"

After the wonderful peace she had known, this terrible invasion of the powers of evil, this awakening of the forces of passion that are dormant in every human soul, proved more than she could resist. She sank upon her knees; but to pray was impossible, unless the dumb cry of the soul, in its agony of pain and revolt, rose to God as prayer. And she was still kneeling, her face buried in her hands, when a touch upon her shoulder made her start violently and look up, her heart leaping like a wild thing in her breast with the fear of what face she might see.

But it was only Nina's kind, anxious face that was bent toward her, and Nina's voice that whispered:

"I have come to tell you that if you don't mind staying here a little longer than usual,

instead of going out to *dejeuner*, it—it will be best. There are some people in Chartres whom you would not like to meet, and so—"

Madeleine nodded.

"I understand," she murmured in reply. "I have seen them. I will stay here until you tell me that they are gone."

"I think they are going soon," Nina assured her. "There is an immense automobile waiting for them at the hotel door. I'll watch and let you know as soon as they have left."

"Thank you!" Madeleine replied; and then as Nina moved away, her face went down again into her hands, and again all the waves of bitterness rolled over her soul.

It was perhaps an hour later that the touch came once more on her shoulder, and Nina's voice said in her ear:

"They are safely gone. Come now! You must be nearly famished. Let us go and get our *dejeuner*."

Although *dejeuner* was the last thing of which she was conscious of any need, Madeleine rose immediately and followed the speaker from the chapel. For the first time she had a sense of relief in leaving the Cathedral and finding herself in the open air. The awful consciousness of bondage and shame which had fallen upon her there seemed somewhat lifted as she came out into the sun-flooded *place*, and looked across at the hotel door, where the great touring car of which Nina had spoken had stood

a little while before, and from which it was now vanished—as those whom it carried had vanished out of her life.

"I will not think of them again," she told herself. "It is too hideous to be true that I am still bound to that man. I will not believe it. I am—I must be—free!"

She drew a deep breath, as of one who flings off an intolerable load, which made her companion glance at her curiously. But something in the expression of the pale, set face kept Nina from asking any questions; and it was not until the delayed *dejeuner* was over and they were resting at ease in their apartment—for neither seemed to think of going out again,—that Madeleine herself spoke of the morning's occurrence.

"How did you chance to see those people?" she asked. "And did—any one recognize you?"

"I'm afraid he did," Nina answered, knowing for whom "any one" stood in Madeleine's mind. "It was most unlucky, but just the way things happen in life. As it chanced, I went out this morning without waiting for the mail; and, suddenly needing some paints I had ordered from Paris, I thought I would run over and see what the *facteur* had left for me. I found my paints and a letter; and I was on my way back, reading the last, when I almost ran into a man who came out of the church door just as I was about to enter it. When I looked up, I saw that he was staring

oddly at me, and then I recognized him. It was George Raynor."

"Did you say anything?"

"*I!*—say anything to *him?* Certainly not. I met his eyes for a moment; and then, without a sign of recognition, I passed on. But of course he knew me, just as I knew him."

"Of course he would know you," Madeleine agreed; and then she was silent until Nina, overcome with anxious curiosity, asked:

"And you—did he see you?"

"Thank God, no!" Madeleine answered. "He did not see my face, because I turned my back when I heard the party approaching, and neither did I see his. But I heard his voice! And, Nina—"

"Yes, dear."

"Is there anything more dreadful than the sound of a voice that you—hate? And what an awful thing hatred is! It fills the soul with such deadly, sickening force! I have felt it before (*he* has made me feel it), but I have been so happily at peace of late that I had almost forgotten what it was like. Yet in a moment—when I heard those odious tones that were so familiar, and brought such a tide of horrible memories—it all rushed back upon me with an intensity that almost made me faint."

"But you didn't faint?"

"Oh, no! I suppose I wasn't really in danger of doing so. But the storm of emotion seized

me so suddenly that I seemed to have no power of resistance, and it was as if soul and body both went down before it. I don't know what I should have done if I had continued to hear his voice. But he soon went away (no doubt that was when you met him), and the others remained."

Again Nina glanced at her curiously.

"Did you know the others?" she asked.

"No," Madeleine answered slowly,—"that is, I had never seen any of them before; but I knew much of one—she who was Mrs. Trevis and is now called Mrs. George Raynor."

Nina made an inarticulate exclamation, and then she inquired:

"How did you recognize her?"

"He was speaking to her, and his tone told me who she was. You see, I had heard just such tones so often. Then, when he went away, she sent the others—some girl and a man—off together, and she sat down beside me."

"And?"

"And presently began to talk. I could not refuse to answer her, without betraying what I did not wish to betray; and—and it was soon clear to me that she is a miserable woman."

"I hope so," said Nina, vindictively. "She certainly deserves to be."

"Yes, I suppose she deserves to be," Madeleine assented. "But when one comes into

contact with misery, one must be sorry for it even when it is deserved."

"I don't believe I could ever be sorry for her. You don't mean to say that you are?"

"I don't know exactly what I am now, but while I talked to her I was certainly sorry. Her unhappiness was so evident, and her philosophy of life—if one could dignify it by such a name—so deplorable. To seize what you want at whatever cost to any one else, and without any law of right or justice; and not to endure anything unpleasant a moment longer than a way can be found to fling it off,—she did not hesitate to say that those are her rules of conduct. And what else but misery could they bring?"

"They brought her at least what she wanted; and I, for one, can't sympathize with her if she finds the result not altogether agreeable. But if her rule is not to endure anything a moment after it becomes unpleasant, why does she continue to endure George Raynor? Even in the glance I cast at him, I could see that he was in one of his worst tempers."

"I believe she would have told me that, or anything else, if I had given her any encouragement to do so. But, on the contrary, I got away as soon as possible."

"I should think, you would have, indeed! I never heard anything so—incredible as that she should have come to you for sympathy in her troubles."

"Don't you know that when people feel the need of expression—and undisciplined natures feel it very strongly—they often speak to a stranger more freely than they would to one whom they know? And I was a stranger to her."

"Did she make no effort to find out who you were?"

"Yes: she asked my name; but I declined to give it, and hurried away. Then there came over me again the sense of faintness that I had felt before; and I was barely able to enter the chapel where you found me, and sit down, before I lost consciousness, for a moment at least."

"I had been looking for you for some time," Nina said, "and I was beginning to be very anxious, when I glanced for the second time into that chapel and saw you there. It was a horrid experience. I don't wonder you felt faint. But, thank Heaven, it's all over and done with now!"

"Ah, but that is what it isn't!" Madeleine cried in a tone of such keen anguish that the other started. "Don't you see—don't you understand—that if I am still that man's wife, it can never be over and done with for me?"

"Madeleine!" (Nina's tone was angry now as well as started.) "How can you say such a thing? How can you still be the man's wife when you have not only divorced him but

when he has given that place to another woman?"

Madeleine looked at her with wide, dark eyes full of pain.

"The question is, whether I had the power to divorce him, or he the power to take another wife. It all rests on that, you know; and the Catholic Church says that neither I nor he had such power. If this is so, then it is not the unhappy woman to whom I was talking who is his wife, but I—*I*, who am even more unhappy!"

"You are distracted—or morbid, which is equally bad!" Nina told her. "I've known all the time what would be the result of your infatuation with the Catholic Church, and now you perceive it. It was easy to talk of accepting the rigid laws of that religion, but I doubt if you have ever before realized to what you would be dooming yourself by accepting them."

"You are right; I haven't realized it before," Madeleine said in a tone of despair. "I have been so happy, conscious only of peace and rest in the light of faith which came to me, that I have given little thought to the change this faith would make in my position. No doubt this seems very stupid to you; and I can explain it only by saying that I had been so long accustomed to the belief that I was free, that even though I was prepared to accept the teaching of the Church about the indis-

solubility of marriage, I didn't bring it home to myself—didn't, as you have said, realize that, instead of being free, I am still hopelessly bound. But at the first sound of that detested voice, this realization rushed upon me with the force of an electric shock. Those tones, with their dreadful associations, not only recalled all the suffering of the past, but it was as if they were addressed to me, as if they claimed me, as if they were reminding me that he was still—still—I can not express it, but the horror was beyond words."

"This is worse than morbid," Nina declared with energy: "it is positive madness. You must put such thoughts out of your mind; and, above all, you must cease to regard what the Catholic Church says on the subject of divorce. It is as I told you when you first spoke to me on the subject: in your position you can't afford to become a Catholic. It is not to be thought of."

"You talk," said Madeleine, in the same despairing tone, "as if it were a matter of choice with me."

"And isn't it a matter of choice? Haven't you deliberately encouraged the fancy, and allowed your imagination to be completely captivated by the poetical and artistic appeals which that faith knows so well how to make? But you see that it won't do. You can't accept the position in which it would place you—that of a woman bound to a man who is free."

"You make a good devil's advocate," Madeleine said; "though of course you don't mean to be so. All that you suggest, and more besides, came to me as I knelt in the church trying to pray and unable to do so. And, in the horror of the thought of being still bound to that man, the mere sound of whose voice had filled me with loathing, I felt, for the first time, a revulsion against the Catholic Church. All the attraction of which you have spoken vanished, all the peace that I thought I had found fled from my soul, and I was conscious only of passionate revolt against the idea that any tie still exists between George Raynor and myself."

Nina nodded approvingly.

"I hope you will continue to feel that way," she said. "It is the only sensible view to take. And you must forgive me if I add that I'm glad he crossed your path again, since it has helped you to understand your position, and to realize how impossible it is for you to enter the Catholic Church."

Madeleine did not contradict this positive statement; indeed, she did not speak at all for several minutes, but sat with her hands clasped behind her head, gazing out of the window at the great front of the Cathedral across the *place*. Her eyes were full of infinite sadness, and the same sadness was in her tone when she presently said:

"I feel as if I had been allowed a glimpse

into heaven, and then the door had been shut in my face. It isn't so much that I am unwilling to pay the penalty of becoming a Catholic—heavy as that penalty would be,—but the desire to enter the Church seems to have left me. And yet if I lose the light of that vision which appeared to open the way to such wonderful things, what is to become of me? What am I to do with my life?"

"You can fill it with something better and more satisfying than mystical visions," Nina replied promptly. "Some warm human happiness is what you need to make you forget all the morbid ideas which have been born of loneliness and pain. I'm quite sure of that."

"I am sure of nothing except that I am tired, deadly tired, in soul as well as in body," Madeleine said wearily.

"Necessarily you feel wretchedly, after such a nervous shock," Nina told her. "The best thing for you is to go and lie down. Rest will do you more good than anything else."

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall answer the letter I received this morning. It is from Dick Carruthers, whom you liked so much in Paris, you remember?"

"I remember: the clever young painter, whom you would not admit was in love with you."

"We have something else to do, he and I, besides falling in love," returned Nina, loftily. "We are simply good comrades, good friends,

as two men might be. You don't understand the modern point of view, Madeleine. You are really very old-fashioned in your ideas."

"Perhaps I am," Madeleine assented indifferently, as she rose from her chair; and then adding, "I think I will take your advice about lying down for a little while," she moved away.

Nina looked after her with rather an odd expression; and when the portière had fallen over the door through which the slight figure disappeared, she drew from her pocket a letter and opened it, frowning slightly as she did so.

"It hardly seems as if it could have been a mere coincidence that I was reading this when I ran into George Raynor," she remarked to herself, as her eyes, passing down the written page, found and rested on a certain paragraph which said:

"Since it appears that you have no intention of returning to Paris at any time in the near future, I have decided to run over to Chartres and see what you are about. Painting the Cathedral sounds a very large undertaking, and it may be necessary to curb your vaulting ambition by a little friendly criticism. You may, therefore, look for me very soon. And perhaps it is as well to add that I shall have with me a man who is extremely anxious to meet your friend Mrs. Raynor. He saw her picture—you remember the head I sketched of her!—in my studio, and recognized it at once; and, from the pressing nature of his inquiries, it

was soon apparent that his chief, if not sole, business on this side of the water is to renew his acquaintance, or possibly more than acquaintance, with her. I wonder if you know anything about him? He is an American, and his name is John Maitland. I met him accidentally only a few weeks ago; but he is a very likeable fellow, and so we have grown rather intimate. I was doubtful about giving him Mrs. Raynor's address, since it seems that she left America so abruptly and mysteriously that the inference was that she did not wish her whereabouts to be known. But there can be no objection to his accompanying me to visit an interesting old city, and see a Cathedral which is a great monument of art."

Nina laughed at this point.

"How like Dick!" she observed.

Then her glance, too, wandered through the window to the noble church which dominated the view, and she spoke aloud as if to a living personality:

"I believe I do know something about Mr. John Maitland," she said. "If I am right, he has arrived at the psychological moment, and I think his influence will probably make an end of yours."

CHAPTER IV.

WHATEVER Nina thought of the psychological moment for the return of John Maitland into Madeleine's life, she was very careful to say nothing of this return to the person most concerned—that is, Madeleine herself. She was too uncertain of the manner in which the news might be received to run any risk in communicating it while there might be time for her friend "to do something morbid or rash," as she put it to herself; which meant to refuse to see John Maitland, and perhaps insist upon leaving Chartres before his arrival. An instinct warned Nina that these things were quite possible; for she was well aware that under Madeleine's gentleness there lay a power of steel-like resolution, when once the strength of her nature was roused. And even had she been ignorant of this, the story told of the "coin of sacrifice," and the flight which had been made to save another from paying that coin, would have sufficiently enlightened her. Quite comprehensively, therefore, and with no doubt whatever of her own wisdom, she summed up the situation in her mind, and took her resolution.

"He shall have his chance," she said to

herself; "and, above all, Madeleine shall have hers. All this morbid mysticism, into which she has drifted through unhappiness, must be blown away by the only force strong enough to do it—the force of sane, natural, human love. It is because her poor heart is insistently craving the love which has been denied it that she has taken refuge in these unreal fancies. And she was always so unselfish that it is easy to understand why the idea of sacrifice appealed to her so irresistibly that it made her run away and hide herself from the man whom, it is quite clear, she really loves. And he must love her very truly, since this love has triumphed over the narrow teachings of his religion, and has brought him across the world to seek her. Such a proof of devotion will surely be more than she can resist; and, as if to help him in every possible way, fate has sent George Raynor across her path at this critical time, to produce the revulsion against Catholic ideals to which she confesses, and to make her realize the bondage to which she would be dooming herself by embracing that faith. Oh, it will all come right! I'm sure it will all come right; and I shall have the gratification of seeing her, with the past all put behind her, happy at last."

Nina, whose heart was much warmer than her head was clear, fairly hugged herself with pleasure over this anticipation. And she laughed joyously when Madeleine, observing

her air of suppressed radiance, said to her:

"I think you are more glad at the prospect of seeing Mr. Carruthers than you will admit."

"But I haven't the least hesitation about admitting it," she replied. "I'm delighted at the idea of seeing him, and—er—he may possibly bring a friend with him whom I shall also be glad to see. I think it will do us both good to have some fresh, modern companionship, and get away from gloomy mediæval associations for a time."

Madeleine looked at her with a smile.

"I don't really think that the gloomy mediæval associations have had much effect in depressing you," she said. "But if you want to get away from them, why should we not leave Chartres? You know I have been ready to go for some time."

"Yes, I know; and that my desire to finish my picture has alone kept you. I should be very remorseful over this delay, which brought about that painful meeting of yesterday, if I were not sure that the meeting had served a good purpose."

For a moment Madeleine did not answer this confident assertion. They were taking their first breakfast of coffee and rolls in their sitting-room, the windows of which commanded a view of the great church across the *place;* and she glanced wistfully out of one of these windows as she said slowly:

"I understand what you mean. But if you

could know how desolate I feel this morning! It is as if the Cathedral, although it still stands yonder, had been taken from me; for I am reluctant to enter it again and meet the associations which have come into it. When I waked this morning, my first consciousness was of that weight upon the heart which one feels after a great bereavement. At first I wondered what it meant; and then all came back to me—the meeting of yesterday, the revival of dreadful memories, the cruel loss of peace and happiness, and of all that the Cathedral, which I have learned to love so dearly, has been to me."

Nina put out her hand and patted the other hand which lay on the table near her.

"I am awfully sorry for you," she said. "But the truth is that you need something better than a cathedral to love."

"Ah, you say that because you don't in the least understand what I mean when I talk of loving the Cathedral!" Madeleine cried, with a sharp pang in her voice. "Do you suppose that it was merely the building, noble and glorious as it is, that I loved? It was what I found there which made it seem like heaven to me. And into this sanctuary of peace the dreadful past pursued and seized and claimed me. Do you wonder that I feel as if it were still lying there in wait, to claim me again with all the force of law—"

"It is," Nina said below her breath.

"And that I can not bear to face the struggle it implies? So, instead of a sanctuary of peace, those walls seem now to enclose a battle-ground, a field of strife worse than any I have yet known. And I shrink from entering the doors I have been so eager to enter before. O Nina, isn't it hard? Why should those people have come here? Why couldn't I have been left in peace in this one spot of earth?"

"Sometimes strife is better than peace," Nina replied, "because better things may come out of it. I've no doubt you think me very unsympathetic, but I *can't* be sorry that you have realized before it is too late the full significance of the step you were almost ready to take."

"I was quite ready to take it, and nothing has happened which should change that readiness. Yet—God help me!—it has been changed. Nothing looks to me as it did this time yesterday; least of all my own purpose, my own desire."

Nina's look expressed emphatic approval.

"I hope that by this time to-morrow," she said, "you will have gained another purpose, another desire, to take the place of those you have lost."

"You are talking in enigmas," Madeleine told her. "I have no idea where or how I should find anything of the kind."

"It is the unexpected which happens," Nina remarked; and then, conscious that she was

perilously near to betraying what she was most anxious not to betray, she made haste to change the subject. "Dick Carruthers writes that he is coming to curb my ambition by a little friendly criticism of my picture," she said; "so I think I will leave it just as it is until he arrives. I have reached a difficult point, anyway: I can't satisfy myself about the management of the lights and shadows; and, since he is an infinitely better painter than I am, I shall wait for his advice. So, instead of betaking ourselves as usual to the Cathedral, let us spend the morning out of doors. We'll go down to the river, and I'll do some sketching, while you can sit in the sunshine and read or dream as you like."

"As I have nothing pleasant to dream about, I shall certainly read," Madeleine said with decision. But when they were presently ready to go out, Nina observed, with a certain satisfaction, that the volume under her arm was not "La Cathédrale,"—that book which for so long had been her constant companion.

By one of those streets which tumble from the top of the town to the bottom in a precipitous flight of steps, they made their way down to the tree-planted alleys beside which the river flows in the ancient moat, crossed at intervals by bridges which connect the terraced gardens of cottages that line the farther bank with what were once the ramparts of the fortified city. Here they found that secluded

embankment which Huysmans describes as "near the old Guillaume Gate, where washer-women sang while they soaped the linen in a stream that blossomed, as they rubbed, with flecks of iridescent bubbles."

On a spot which commanded a view of the old gateway, with its crenelated towers, and its archway still showing the groove in which had worked the portcullis that was let down of yore to defend this side of the town, Nina established herself with her sketchbook; while Madeleine found a seat near by, and, instead of opening the volume she had brought with her, sat looking dreamfully—in spite of her determination not to dream—at the arm of the river which here, as Huysmans has also said, "washes the feet of more houses, plays at hide-and-seek in the courts, and muses between walls." By glancing upward she could see the mediæval pile of the old town clustered around the hill on which the Cathedral stands exalted. But for once she did not care to glance upward: just now her gaze preferred to dwell on the current moving so gently about the ancient fortifications, at the washing places where the laundresses knelt, and the tall poplars beside the water-mills. It was as if her soul, frightened by the demands of the supernatural, were taking refuge in the natural, in the homely work and play of the world about her.

And as she sat in the soft sunshine, musing

like the river at her feet, her thoughts went back to all that had antedated her pilgrimage to Chartres. Scene after scene rose before her: the tragedy of her married life—for what tragedy is greater than the death of love and respect?—the crushing in her of all power to feel or to enjoy; her flight to a place where she might find rest, secure from any claim, social or otherwise; the gradual revival in her young spirit of the forces of life; and the coming of the man who had so much to do with this revival, whose devotion seemed to transform existence with a new hope of happiness. And then—but at this point she resolutely forced her thoughts to pause. The interview with his mother which had brought her to renounce this hope of happiness, the suggestion of the mystical coin of sacrifice, and the visit to the church where the light of a vision she had never forgotten had been revealed to her soul,—these things she put away from her with a sense of distaste. Had they, indeed, been born of morbid sentiment, extravagant and unreal, as Nina declared, and as she was well aware that numbers of people besides Nina would have believed? She did not know whether she desired to believe this or not; but the suggestion remained with her, and for the first time she found herself willingly entertaining it.

But most of all it was the memory of John Maitland that came to her, and stayed with a strange persistence. At least, in the light

of after events it seemed to her strange; and she wondered if what those who dabbled in psychical research call the aura of his approaching presence had preceded that presence and influenced her mind to dwell upon him, upon the memory of his love, and upon the sense of security, as of one who rests in a tower of strength and faithfulness, with which he had always inspired her, and which had perhaps been most potent in attracting her regard to him. It did not occur to her then or later, as an explanation of these persistent thoughts, that he stood for all that she had renounced when, paying the coin of sacrifice, she had fled away to seek the fair things of the soul which her vision had revealed; and that in the revulsion from these things—in the passionate impulse of revolt against the bondage they seemed to lay upon her, in the memory of the voice that only the day before had filled her whole being with a dreadful sense of loathing,—she instinctively turned to the memory of the man who had desired to put the bulwark of his love between her and all the hateful past.

She was so quiet as she sat in this dreamful ease, gazing at the gliding current, that Nina, who felt very restless, presently abandoned her artistic efforts and sat down beside her.

"There's a train from Paris due about this time," she said, glancing at her watch, "and I shouldn't be surprised if Dick came out on it."

"That would seem to imply great eagerness

on his part," Madeleine remarked smilingly. "And yet you will not admit that he has any particular reason for eagerness."

"There's always eagerness on his part to do at once whatever he takes it into his head to do at all," Nina answered. "If he received my letter last night, or even this morning, I have a fancy that he will come on the first train to-day. And, this being so, I think we had better go back to our lodgings, or they will not know where to find us."

"*They?*"

"Didn't I tell you that he said he would have a friend with him?"

"Perhaps you did. I wasn't paying much attention just then. And who is the friend? Do you know him?"

To this direct question Nina hardly knew how to reply. She hesitated; and while she hesitated she suddenly became aware that fate was about to take the matter out of her hands, and spare her the necessity of answering it at all; for, glancing up, she saw two men advancing along the tree-lined alley toward them. One, in his easy dress, with his dark, pointed beard and vivacious gestures, might readily have passed for a Frenchman; but the other was the unmistakable well set-up, clean shaven American type; and while she recognized the first as Dick Carruthers, she was equally certain that the second was John Maitland. And now all at once she grew afraid

of what she had done. How could she tell what effect this man's presence would have on Madeleine,—how great or how painful a shock it might prove to the sensitive nature which was still suffering from the shock of yesterday? In her repentant anxiety, she caught the arm beside her, thus diverting Madeleine's attention to herself.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, "you know him,—that is, you have known him. And—and, Madeleine, you must forgive me for not warning you sooner—"

"What is there to warn me about?" Madeleine asked in surprise, her gaze fixed so intently on the agitated face before her that she was altogether unaware of the figures approaching them. Then suddenly she grew pale, and a wild, irrational fear leaped into her eyes. "You can't mean that he—who was here yesterday—has come back?" she gasped.

"Good heavens, no!" Nina cried. "Do you think I am mad? Haven't I told you that this man comes from Paris with Dick Carruthers? He is—Madeleine, he is—"

She stopped abruptly, for the two men were by this time almost beside them. The Gallic-looking young artist sang out gaily:

"Holá! here you are! What good luck to meet you so soon!"

And Madeleine turned quickly—to see John Maitland standing before her.

It was as unexpected as possible; and yet

the first effect of his presence was to quiet her emotion. The wild fear that had clutched her heart died down, as suddenly as it had risen, at sight of his face; and the sense of security which he had always inspired came over her in a great rush of relief. With a composure which astonished Nina, she held out her hand, smiling faintly, yet sweetly.

"So it's you, Mr. Maitland!" she said. "I did not know that you were on this side of the ocean."

"I have not been long on this side," he answered, as he took the slender hand in his, and looked into the eyes which, in their clear darkness, were like leaf-shadowed pools of water. Strangely enough, his composure was far from equal to hers; although he had been prepared for the meeting, and she had not. So he was glad that for the moment it was not necessary to say anything more,—that Carruthers claimed his greeting, and then presented him to Miss Percival.

They all stood together for a few minutes, talking rather distractedly, as people usually do on first meeting. But presently Nina carried Carruthers off to show him the Porte Guillaume at nearer range, and Maitland was left alone with Madeleine. As their eyes met again, out of the fulness of his heart rushed the question he had so long desired to ask her.

"Why," he demanded, "did you run away in such a manner?"

CHAPTER V.

"WHY did you run away in such a manner?"

Those abrupt words of Maitland seemed to brush aside any need of a preface, and bring them at once to the very heart of all that stood between them. The tall young man, with his firm-set mouth and chin, looked down at the delicate face, which met his gaze so unshrinkingly,—the face, with its halo of golden hair and dark pathetic eyes, which had drawn him across the world; and his own eyes, glowing with determination, said that at last his question must be answered. But, indeed, there seemed no hesitation about answering it on Madeleine's part.

"I told you why I went away," she said gently. "Did you not receive my letter?"

"Your letter? Yes, I received it," he replied. "But there was no explanation—no adequate explanation—in that."

"Did you not think so?" Her tone maintained its gentle composure unchanged. "I thought I was very explicit."

"You were explicit enough about your intentions," he said, "but not about the great change in your way of looking at things which had caused you to form such intentions. Of

course I guessed much." He frowned, and his square, determined chin seemed to take a firmer set. "My mother had seen you and she had worked upon your sympathy, your generosity, your fears. Did you think I wouldn't understand where all the talk about ruining my life and endangering my soul came from? But did any of it justify you in taking matters so completely into your own hands, in giving me no opportunity to say or do anything, and in embracing a wild ideal of sacrifice which could bring only suffering to both of us? For, Madeleine, you can't deny that when I saw you last you were ready to marry me."

"There is no reason why I should deny it," she answered quietly. "It is true that I was ready to marry you then."

"And yet"—all the passion of the man's nature blazed in his eyes and spoke in the deep reproach of his voice—"you threw me over at a word from one who had no right to interfere between us, and left me in a manner which in another I would not hesitate to call utterly heartless!"

There was again a moment's silence before Madeleine asked, with the same quietness:

"If you would call such conduct heartless in another, why do you hesitate to call it so in me?"

"Because," he returned quickly, "I believe that it was through your heart—the heart which I know to be so easily touched—that

you were led to act as you did, and I believe that you suffered in the acting. If I did not believe this, I should not be here now."

"You are right," she told him: "I certainly suffered in acting as I did. But if it were to do over, I could not act otherwise."

He looked at her with a mingling of apprehension and obstinacy in his face.

"I have crossed the ocean," he said, "to make you change your mind on that point."

She sighed—perhaps for pity of him, or perhaps for pity of herself in the coming struggle.

"There are some things," she said, "with regard to which change of mind is not possible. I wish that you would believe that this is one of them, and spare us both useless pain."

"I would do much to spare you pain," he replied. "Indeed, it is because I desire to spare you pain in an enduring sense that I can not allow you to continue in the belief that the sacrifice which you have been led to make is necessary, that you are called upon to immolate your happiness and mine—and God knows I think more of yours than of my own!—because of an appeal which my mother made to you."

"Surely you know," she said, "that if your mother's appeal moved me, it was because she opened my eyes to things which I had not understood before,—because she made me realize that, instead of being an influence for good, a source of true happiness to you, I

should, if I married you, do you the greatest injury which it is possible for one creature to do another, by cutting you off from your religion, and dooming you to the lower rather than the higher way of life."

"It is just such folly as this that I imagined she had put into your head," Maitland said sternly. "Well, I am here to tell that my religion is my own affair; that you have no reason to trouble yourself about it; and that, as for dooming me to the lower way, no way in which you walked could ever be low to me."

"You intend to be kind," she replied. "But when you tell me that I have no reason to trouble myself about your religion, you are really shutting me out from that which has the deepest hold upon your life. And what could this mean except that the way in which we walked together would be a low instead of a high way?"

He regarded her for an instant with the expression of one who finds in his path an obstacle for which he is totally unprepared.

"I don't in the least understand," he said at length, "why you should now take a view which did not occur to you when we talked of this matter last. You did not then consider my religion a dividing force between us."

"Because I knew too little about it to comprehend how much it was a dividing force," she answered. "But when your mother

explained things to me—why, then I saw."

"Yes." (John Maitland set his teeth over the word.) "The whole difficulty is owing to her interference. I recognize that thoroughly. But it hardly seems as if her influence with you should be greater than mine."

"I should not call it so much her influence," Madeleine replied, "as an influence which was behind all that she said. She was kindness itself,—don't for an instant do her the injustice of thinking otherwise. And she simply told me what I did not know before,—how the Catholic Church regards divorce; and she made me realize that you would be cutting yourself off from your religion by marrying a divorced woman." She paused for a moment, and then— "When I once clearly understood that, there was nothing for me but to do what I did," she ended simply.

"On the contrary," Maitland returned with a positiveness which she remembered as one of his strongest traits, "there was something very different for you to do, and that was to consult me before acting in a matter which concerned me so vitally. My mother had no right to interfere in my affairs, and you had no right to decide for both of us on an impulse of self-sacrifice. Had you given me an opportunity to speak, I should have told you that you had nothing to do with the laws of the Catholic Church, about divorce. They were not binding on you, and I was

able to take care of myself in that as in other respects."

"But how could you take care of yourself?" she asked. "As a Catholic, such a marriage would certainly cut you off from the Church."

"Will you leave me to settle that with the Church?" he demanded, in a tone of defiance which did not seem to be altogether, if at all, for her. "It is—it should be enough for you that I am ready to marry you the moment you put your hand in mine, let the Church say or do what it will."

"You think it should be enough for me?" she demanded in turn, in a voice which had a piercing poignancy in its low tones. "Is *that* your opinion of me? You think that I am one of the women who exist in the world to lure men into paths of sin and destruction? No, don't speak!" (He had opened his lips quickly.) "I understand that you would disavow such a thought, but it is the real meaning of what you have said. You are willing to throw away your religion for my sake; and you think that I should be willing to accept this tremendous sacrifice,—willing to make myself an obstacle between your soul and God, and to stand as an immovable barrier in the path of your possible return to higher things. Ah, you don't know me! If I had no religious belief myself, I should still be unable to play such a part. But as it is—as it is—"

Her voice broke: she could say no more;

and, turning abruptly, she walked away from him.

Maitland stood where she left him, staring blankly after her. He had seldom been more astonished than by the feeling she exhibited, and by the manner in which she had completely changed the point at issue between them. It almost seemed as if he had offered an insult instead of a proof of devotion which might have touched any woman's heart, he thought,—especially a heart so tender as that which had responded to his devotion before. In anticipation he had gone over this interview many times, but never in his wildest fancy had it ended as it was ending now. Always in his imagination he had seen Madeleine deeply moved—and how often for less cause had not gratitude looked at him out of her lovely eyes!—and quick to reward his sacrifice with exquisite self-surrender. That she would grasp the real nature of this sacrifice, and of all that it implied, did not, however, for an instant occur to him. He knew so well the Protestant point of view—which considers "one religion as good as another," and holds no claim higher than that of human love—that, taking for granted her acceptance of this view, he was entirely unprepared for her comprehension of all that he was ready to give up for her sake.

For, as it chanced, her letter to him had thrown no light upon the motives which

chiefly moved her to the renunciation that he had attributed wholly to his mother's personal appeal. There was no hint of the "coin of sacrifice," whether to be paid by herself or another. She merely told him that she had learned that the teaching of his Faith stood as an insurmountable barrier between them; and, since she could never accept the responsibility of separating him from the Church whose laws he would violate by marrying her, she was removing herself out of his life, and begged that he would make no effort to follow or find her.

It was a pathetic letter, in its simplicity and brevity, for one who could have read its true meaning under the lines; but it acted upon John Maitland as resistance and disappointment are likely to act upon a passionate and headstrong nature. There was an interview with his mother, of which, to do him justice, he did not like to think; and then, flinging all consideration of anything and everything else to the winds, he set forth to find the woman whose deep hold upon his heart he had hardly known until she vanished out of his life; and to bend, as he felt no doubt of his power to do, her will to his.

Yet, now that he had found her, he was compelled to realize that her will opposed him with an apparently unbending strength; and as he stood, gazing with angry, baffled surprise at the figure which had moved away

from him, an instinct told him that this resistance had its root in the influence which he on his part was defying,—the influence of that serene, immovable Faith against which the world, the flesh and the devil wage unceasing war. How this influence had reached and affected her, he did not know; it was a force with which most certainly he had not expected to reckon. But he recognized the attitude of mind which it produces, the consciousness of supernatural values that is so alien and, it may be added, so abhorrent to the purely human view of life; and he could account for this only by supposing that his mother's appeal had been even more powerful than he imagined in enlisting against him the sensitive conscience which dictated her denial of the suit he had crossed the world to press. At this thought resentment again mounted within him like a rising tide,—resentment toward his mother, whose interference he could not forgive; and also toward the august power which gave that interference such lasting force. With renewed determination to assert his will against intolerable opposition, he strode up to the figure that had paused on the bank of the stream which flowed with still current through the ancient moat.

"Madeleine," he said reproachfully, "I never dreamed that you could be so bitterly unjust to me!"

She turned to meet his gaze, and he thought

that he had never seen anything at once so sad and so beautiful as her eyes.

"It is the last thing I could possibly wish to be—unjust to you," she replied in her low, sweet voice. "I owe you so much—"

"You owe me nothing,—nothing!" he interrupted. "There can be no question of owing anything between you and me. The love I have given you is a free gift, which I could not withhold if I would; and what I ask from you must be also a free gift. If you can give this, don't lessen it by mention of other things."

"It will not lessen anything which I have given, or can give you, to tell you how grateful I am for what you have given me," she answered, with the same exquisite gentleness. "I have not had very much love in my life, and yours has been a revelation to me. All that you were to me, all the chivalrous tenderness of word and act which you showed me before I went away, is written on my heart. And now this last proof of devotion—that you have come so far to offer again what is not of less value because I can not accept it,—do you think this does not touch me even more deeply, and in a manner I can never forget?"

"And yet" (again his tone reproached her) "you said only a few minutes ago that I thought unworthily of you, that I imagined you were one of the women—no, I can't repeat

what you did not hesitate to say, and to charge me with believing."

"Forgive me!" she begged. "I should not have said it, for I know that you think too highly of me in almost all respects. But, nevertheless, it is true that the part you wish me to play in your life—the only part which you have power to give me—would be an unworthy one. And what hurt me when I spoke as I did a moment ago was the perception that you thought so poorly of me as to believe that I was blind to this,—that I was not able to recognize that, if I consented to marry you, no love of yours or mine could alter the fact that I should be an influence to drag you down in a moral sense, and that nothing I could give you would make amends for so great an injury."

"You talk in this way because you don't know—you don't realize in the least—what you could give and what you could be to me," he assured her passionately. "As for the moral issue, you have drawn your ideas from things which my mother said to you, and which you were not able to weigh reasonably because you did not know how exaggerated her utterances were."

"I do not think," Madeleine said, "that any utterances could have been less exaggerated than your mother's when she talked to me. But the crux of the matter rests in a simple question which you can answer if you will:

does not the Catholic Church refuse to recognize divorce, and does she not therefore forbid the marriage of Catholics with divorced persons?"

"What, I ask again, have you to do with the laws of the Catholic Church?" Maitland demanded, with unconcealed impatience. "They are not binding upon and do not concern you."

"Ah, you evade the point!" she said, with a hopeless gesture. "You will not acknowledge what you know to be the truth, and you take refuge in the assertion that this truth does not concern me. I have tried to make you understand how much it would concern me if I married you in defiance of laws which are certainly binding on you; but I have failed to make this clear to you. Let me, then, make something else clear,—let me tell you that the laws of the Catholic Church concern me also, because, in belief at least, I am a Catholic myself."

"You!" Maitland stared at her in stunned amazement for a moment, before he cried violently: "It is impossible! I can not believe it!"

"Why can you not believe it?" she asked. "The Catholic Faith attracts many people to embrace it: why should it not attract me?"

"Because," he answered,—"because—"

And then he stopped abruptly, not only from the difficulty of formulating the thoughts

and feelings which rushed upon him with overwhelming force, but chiefly because, if he had uttered the one thought which stood forth most clearly in his mind, it would have been the same which Nina expressed when she said, "A woman in your position can not afford to become a Catholic." He had, in truth, a sense as if the world were reeling around him. He had crossed continents and seas to find this woman and tell her that for her sake he was prepared to cast off the yoke which divine faith lays upon the soul of man,—and, lo! she faced him with the news that she was herself ready to assume this yoke.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT Nina's conscience was not altogether at rest with regard to the manner in which she had treated Madeleine was apparent in a certain distraction of mind and manner, which the young man whom she had carried off to admire the mediæval picturesqueness of the Porte Guillaume soon perceived, and concerning which, when taxed therewith, she readily became confidential.

"It was really very unkind," she admitted, "to spring such a surprise upon her without a word of warning. If the man had dropped from the sky, she couldn't have been less prepared to see him."

"But his arrival in that fashion would have been a trifle more startling," Carruthers suggested, with a twinkle of amusement in his bright brown eyes. "As it was, the shock did not appear to be very great or very unpleasant."

"Do you think she is the kind of woman to betray how great or how unpleasant it was?" Nina demanded, with a tinge of scorn. "She behaved beautifully, of course—I don't believe Madeleine could behave otherwise,—but that does not argue that she isn't thinking very hard things of me just now."

"If you knew that the surprise would be painfully startling, why didn't you lessen the shock by telling her that he was coming?" Carruthers naturally inquired.

"For one reason, because I was afraid that she might refuse to stay here to meet him," Nina answered. "When people have once found how easy it is to run away from difficulties, that is likely to seem to them the best, as well as the easiest mode of avoiding trouble; when in reality it is a mode which is not only cowardly but futile, as the present instance proves."

"I am to infer, then, that Mrs. Raynor is in the habit of running away—from difficulties in general or only from Maitland?"

"You are not to infer anything so ridiculous! She is not *in the habit* of running away from anything. I only meant that, having once adopted this method of escaping from a difficult situation, she might be tempted to try it again."

"It would have been quite futile—if Maitland represents the difficult situation," Carruthers remarked. "That man is obstinacy incarnate, and would have followed her around the world. But why—if it's permitted to ask—should she have been unwilling to meet him? What has he done?"

"*He!* Nothing but what is commendable, from my point of view. But, unfortunately, my point of view isn't hers. And—and the

situation is so complicated that I don't see how I can make it clear to you."

"On account of my stupidity?"

"Well, not precisely—although men are often frightfully stupid where women are concerned,—but because the factors of complication are difficult to explain."

"Oh, if that is all!" Carruthers made an airy gesture. "I'll assist you to overcome the difficulty of explanation; and a complicated situation is generally an interesting one. What are the factors of complication in this case?"

"I'm not sure that I know all of them myself," Nina confessed. "But those most apparent are: a divorce in America, a wretched party in an automobile who were here yesterday, that Cathedral up yonder on the hill, the religion of the man who has just arrived, and Madeleine's own morbid mysticism."

Carruthers looked slightly dazed.

"It sounds not only complicated, but very wild," he commented. "Consider the density of the masculine mind, and kindly condescend to a few particulars. To begin at the beginning, Mrs. Raynor, then, is a divorcée?"

"Yes. But you must understand that it was she who obtained the divorce; and she was forced to do so because the man whom she married, when she was too young to know what she was doing, proved absolutely intolerable in every respect. I can't enter into details of the story; but I assure you that

she was blameless throughout, and endured a great deal more than she ever should have endured."

"I can readily believe it. She is just the type of woman who in an earlier and happier age would unmurmuringly have allowed her lord and master to take her by the hair and beat her head against the wall. But those days are over; and now Griselda obtains a divorce. I've not the least doubt of her being entitled to it; but, all the same, it rather spoils the ideal."

"If *that* isn't the confession of a man's view!"

"Not at all," Carruthers hastened to tell her. "It is only an artist's view. Men, you know, have made the divorce laws which enable Griseldas to free themselves. But to return to our mutton. Since Mrs. Raynor is divorced, what have the other factors to do with the matter? I pass over the wretched party in an automobile—which rather suggests Charles Lamb's 'party in a parlor, all silent and all damned,'—but I am curious to know how the Cathedral can possibly affect the situation."

"I am afraid," said Nina, darkly, "that it is the most powerful factor of all. Madeleine seems absolutely bewitched by the church, and by a book about it. Did you, by the by, ever hear of a writer named Huysmans?"

"Did I ever hear of him! My dear girl, what do you take me for? Joris Karl Huysmans, man of letters, genius, symbolist, mystic;

beginning as diabolist, and ending as saint! I remember now that he wrote a book which is all about this wonderful Cathedral of Chartres. It is of that you are speaking?"

"That is it. Madeleine has seemed distracted over the book; and in consequence she has haunted the Cathedral, as if she were under a spell—until yesterday."

"And then?"

"Then something happened which in a measure broke the spell. The party in an automobile of which I've spoken (who were far from being all silent, however much they may have been the—er—other thing), came into the church—"

"In an automobile?"

"Don't be absurd! Of course they left the automobile outside. But *they* came in; and as they wandered about, talking at the top of their voices, Madeleine recognized one voice as that of the man who had been her husband.

"But if she divorced him, he isn't her husband any longer, perhaps not even an acquaintance—I don't know the laws of etiquette governing the social relations of divorced people,—so why should she have minded however much he shouted in the Cathedral of Chartres?"

"Dick, whether you are obtuse or not, you can sometimes be offensively flippant. I don't think I'll tell you anything more."

"Oh, do!—do!" Carruthers urged. "I am very much interested; and I promise not to

be flippant again, even if I can't help being obtuse. Well, Mrs. Raynor recognized her ex-husband's voice, with what result?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. But the result is not yet clear."

"Now, what do you mean by that? Being enigmatical is worse than being flippant."

"It is Madeleine who is enigmatical," Nina declared. "I haven't the faintest idea what she will finally do. You see, thanks to that Huysmans book, and to the effect of the Cathedral on her imagination, she has been on the point of entering the Catholic Church. I have only induced her to defer the step by begging her to stay here until I could finish my picture."

"Then the picture has been merely an excuse to make her defer the step?"

"Oh, no! I've made it an excuse. But it really has taken a great hold on me, and I think—but never mind about the picture! You'll see it presently. It's the situation as it relates to Madeleine that I'm trying to explain to you."

"And so far you've brought her to the threshold of the Catholic Church. What's your objection, by the by, to her entering, if she wants to do so? There are worse religions than the Catholic."

"I'm afraid you are certainly obtuse," Nina told him frankly. "I am quite above narrow prejudice; and if I wanted to enter the Catholic

Church myself, I'd do so without the least hesitation. But if Madeleine is ever to find happiness by making a new life for herself, as she has every right to do, she must not enter a church which would hold her to be still bound to the man she has divorced."

Carruthers whistled softly.

"I was indeed obtuse," he said. "But now I see your point of view."

"She saw it too—after she heard his voice," Nina went on. "It made her realize, as no words of mine had been able to do, what her position would be—as a Catholic. The mere thought of being still bound to the man who treated her so abominably—and who, by the way, has married another woman—made her positively ill, and caused a revulsion of feeling against the religion which before had attracted her strongly. So much she has acknowledged; but how far this change of mind or heart will carry her is what I don't know. Only it seemed to me providential that just at this psychological moment I should receive your letter telling me that you were about to bring on the scene a man whom she left America to avoid marrying."

"Why was it necessary for her to leave America to avoid marrying him?"

"It's rather a long story. Madeleine had practically accepted him; but she gave him up, and went away without letting him know where she was going, because his mother came

to her and worked upon her sympathy and her conscience."

"But *why?*"

"Because the man is a Catholic, and his religion will not allow him to marry a divorced woman."

"Ah!" Carruthers whistled again. "So he's a Catholic! Yet—he's here?"

"Yes, he's here." There was a note of unmistakable triumph in Nina's tone. "And since he has proved his love by coming across the world to seek her in defiance of the narrow laws of his religion, I don't see how she can resist such a proof of devotion, and persist in sacrificing her happiness and his to a visionary idea."

"Probably she won't persist. Fate, with your assistance, seems to have arranged the situation in such a manner that there is only one logical end. She will accept Maitland, and forget both the attractions of Catholicity and the divorced gentleman in an automobile."

"I sincerely hope so," said Nina, who, like many other people, had no hesitation in assuming, as far as lay in her power, the prerogatives of Providence in arranging human lives. "Now I think we had better rejoin them. It will look too marked if we remain away longer."

And so it chanced that just as John Maitland received the disconcerting intelligence of Madeleine's turning toward the faith which he was

practically prepared to renounce for her sake, their conversation was interrupted by the return of the two leisurely figures from the Porte Guillaume. As they advanced, Carruthers' artistic eye was caught by the majestic mass of the Cathedral on its exalted height above them, and he paused with an exclamation.

"Heavens! what men—or, rather, what artistic giants—they were, those mediæval architects and builders!" he cried. "Could anything be more superb than that great pile! Look at its noble lines and the soaring grace of its towers!" He lifted his hat with a dramatic gesture. "One salutes the immortal genius which has left such a monument."

"Then you must salute also the faith which inspired the genius," Madeleine said, turning toward him with an eagerness which seemed to suggest relief at this diversion. "For if the great French cathedrals all express the spirit of the ages when they were built, there is no doubt that the Cathedral of Chartres expresses this spirit in the highest degree."

"Have you learned that from Huysmans?" he asked, with a smile. "I understand that you have been studying his extraordinary rhapsody, 'La Cathédrale.'"

"I should not call it so much a rhapsody as an interpretation," Madeleine answered. "I can imagine nothing more interesting than his explanation of the symbolism which is expressed in every line of the architecture,

as well as in the sculpture and the marvellous stained glass. Do you remember how he says, 'Everything lies contained in that building,—the Scriptures, theology, the history of the human race'? And again: 'Notre Dame de Chartres is the most colossal depository existing of heaven and earth, of God and man.'"

"I don't recall the passage," Carruthers confessed, "because I have only glanced into the book, which seemed to be loaded down with all manner of curious lore concerning mediæval symbolism and mysticism, but lacking in human interest."

"It does not tell a story, if that is what you mean," Madeleine replied; "but there are many stories in the world, and few books like 'La Cathédrale.'"

"You'll think me a dreadful Philistine, no doubt, if I say that I don't think that is to be regretted," Nina remarked. And then she turned to the silent young man standing by. "Are you acquainted with this wonderful book, Mr. Maitland?" she asked.

John Maitland started. Absorbed in his own thoughts, he had hardly noticed what was being said by these people, whose return he found such an irritating interruption.

"I really can't say," he replied. "What is the name of the book?"

"It is called 'The Cathedral,' and is all about this wonderful Cathedral of Chartres, and the symbolism of its architecture."

"Something of a guide-book?"

"Oh, dear no! Mr. Carruthers calls it a rhapsody, and Madeleine calls it an interpretation; and both terms describe it very well, for it's both artistic and mystical in the highest degree."

"I know nothing about it," Maitland said; "and I should not like it if I did. I detest mysticism," he added, with apparently unnecessary vehemence. "I prefer things that belong to daylight and clear common-sense."

"But it isn't daylight all the time," Carruthers observed; "and, whether we like it or not, there are a number of mysteries which common-sense is quite unable to explain."

"I'm for leaving them alone then," Maitland returned. "The less we trouble ourselves about mysteries or—or other subtleties, the better, in my opinion."

"We can't afford not to trouble ourselves about the Cathedral of Chartres, however," Carruthers said lightly. "Apart from its architecture and its symbolism, it contains some of the finest stained glass in France, which means in the world. Will you and Huysmans be good enough to show its wonders to me?" he asked, addressing Madeleine.

"I haven't 'La Cathédrale' with me to-day," she answered; "but I can show you some of the things he mentions, and you can read his descriptions and interpretations afterward."

"That is what I meant to propose," he

told her. "I didn't think of using the book as a tourist uses his Baedeker: I prefer having it distilled through your mind. Shall we go now?"

Madeleine hesitated, and glanced at the others. It was the first time she had looked at Maitland since the interruption of their conversation,—an interruption which to her was by no means unwelcome; and the gloom of his face seemed so manifestly reproachful that she addressed him with evident desire to conciliate.

"You will like to see the Cathedral also, will you not?" she asked. "According to Huysmans, it is one of the most remarkable as well as one of the most beautiful churches in the world."

"I don't care much for what a French rhapsodist has to say about it," he replied; "but I suppose one might as well see it, since there's nothing else to do."

"Don't you think," Carruthers suggested to Madeleine, "that we had better leave these two Philistines to express their sentiments to each other, while we go and study the beauties they despise?"

Laughingly he drew her toward the steep ways that led to the higher part of the city, and the others had no alternative but to follow,—Nina more exasperated than she could readily have expressed by this reprehensible conduct on the part of one to whom she had

just been so confidential with regard to the situation as it concerned the other two. Yet she knew that there was a certain *diablerie* in Carruthers, with which it was often necessary to reckon—a gay malice that was clearly to be read in the look he cast backward as he drew Madeleine away,—and she told herself that she might have anticipated some such action from him. This did not, however, lessen the indignation which she felt when she glanced at the countenance of the man walking gloomily beside her.

"As if there were any reason why *I* should be annoyed with him!" she thought. And then a gentler emotion made her add: "Unless I can suggest something to cheer him up a little; for Madeleine has plainly cast him into the depths of despondency."

In consequence of this reflection, she said aloud:

"I hope you don't mind being bracketed with me as a Philistine, Mr. Maitland? For myself, I can support the odium of the charge very cheerfully."

Despite his preoccupation, it occurred to Maitland, as he glanced at the gay, pretty face turned toward him, that a man might cheerfully have submitted to a worse charge in such companionship; and he answered readily enough:

"I assure you that I don't mind in the least, apart from the pleasure of being bracketed

with you. It has never disturbed me at all to be called a Philistine."

"Perhaps you consider it a compliment?"

"To some degree, I do," he acknowledged. "I have always objected very much to anything obscure or mystical; and I believe that is what's called a Philistine attitude of mind by people who like obscurity and mysticism."

"You are quite right," she replied. "But, if that is your attitude of mind, I can't help wondering what you will make of this Huysmans book over which Madeleine raves."

"I can answer that easily enough," he said shortly. "I shall make nothing of it; for I shall not attempt either to read or to understand it."

She glanced at him curiously. His frame of mind on a more personal subject than that of mysticism was quite clear; and it was borne in upon her that, if he was to succeed in the suit which had her cordial approval, he stood in need of the counsel and direction which she felt herself abundantly able to supply. Therefore, after a slight pause, she said:

"But do you take into consideration that if you don't attempt to understand what Madeleine finds so interesting, you will cut yourself off from her in sympathy? And sympathy means more than anything else to a woman."

He looked startled.

"More than love?" he asked involuntarily.

"A woman hardly believes in a love without sympathy," Nina told him impressively.

There was another pause, during which they climbed the steep ways in silence. Then Maitland suddenly swung round toward his companion.

"It seems that you are a great friend of Mrs. Raynor's," he said abruptly; "so I suppose that you are in her confidence. May I speak to you plainly? There are some questions I should like to ask."

"You may speak to me as plainly as you please," Nina replied. "But as for the questions, I can't promise to answer them. One must respect confidence, you know."

"You can tell me at least what influence has turned her thoughts toward the mysticism we have been talking about. It can't have been merely the book you've alluded to which has led her to—to think of entering the Catholic Church?"

"So she told you that!" Nina was undeniably startled in turn, for this looked serious. "I believe," she said slowly, "that many influences have led her to think of it. One of the most powerful was exerted before she left America."

"You don't mean—"

"I mean an interview with your mother, which made a deep impression on her."

"But, good heavens, I should think the

impression from that would have led her in the opposite direction!"

"You would think so, with any one else than Madeleine. But it is difficult to count on her—"

"I have surely found it so," interposed John Maitland, grimly.

"Or rather," Nina corrected herself quickly, "one may always count on her being attracted by exalted ideals, and being led, to her own harm, into paths of sacrifice and renunciation."

"But don't you see," the young man cried, standing still, "that this present idea—for her—is madness?"

"Of course I see," Nina said promptly; "and I have exhausted myself in telling her so, with little effect. But something happened yesterday which was more effective. Has she told you about it?"

He shook his head.

"She has told me nothing," he answered.

"Well, I shall certainly violate no confidence in telling you that," Nina said. "Only here we are at the Cathedral" (they had just emerged upon the *place* before the great church), "and of course you will wish to go in."

Maitland did not answer at once. He looked at the carved portal through which the figures that preceded them had disappeared, and even Nina was struck by the expression of recoil on his face. It was as if he regarded something which he had not only ceased to love, but

which in this moment he had almost come to hate, as the immovable obstacle to his desire. She was hardly surprised when, with a quick movement, he turned his back on the majestic edifice.

"I have not come across the world to see cathedrals," he said. "Nothing there interests me, and no doubt you know it all well. So perhaps you won't object to finding some quiet place where you can tell me what happened yesterday."

CHAPTER VII.

As in the natural world there are landmarks which not only show the traveller how far he has advanced on the road he is following, but also indicate when he has wandered from this road; so in the spiritual life, in the journey of the soul toward its final destination, there are now and again landmarks which serve to tell, and sometimes sharply to warn us, in what direction we are travelling, and how far perhaps we have wandered from the way we set out upon.

It was such a landmark for John Maitland when he turned with a distaste almost amounting to aversion from the door of the Cathedral into which Madeleine had entered; though it is doubtful if he was himself aware of the significance of his action. Neither is it likely that he was conscious of the symbolism which might have been found in this vanishing of the woman he had come to seek into the sanctuary of the Church, while he, a son of the Church, turned away. For there is nothing which has such power to cloud the mind and darken the soul as passion; and passion had held unrestrained sway over Maitland for many days,—passion of self-will, passion of resent-

ment, passion, above all, of a love intensified by opposition and sharpened by disappointment.

"Nothing that you can say or do, and no spiritual penalties with which you or any one else may threaten me, will prevent my finding and marrying the woman whom I love, and whom I should be a cur to forsake, since she has nobody but me to stand by her," he had told his mother in their last interview. And from that position he never in his own mind for one moment receded. Yet he recognized, in some degree at least, on what path this obstinate determination was leading him, and how far he had journeyed along that path, when he was startled by the news of Madeleine's turning toward the Catholic Faith. There was an instant of illumination,—an instant in which he realized how far astray a Catholic must have gone who could be sorry to hear such news as this. But then the storm-mists of passion swept once more over mind and soul, and he was conscious only of anger,—the anger of one who sees an obstacle, which he fancied he had vanquished, rise in his path again stronger than ever.

For he knew, as no outsider could know, the invincible strength of that with which he had to deal. However much he might himself be ready to defy the laws of the Church, there was no hope of his attaining the end of such defiance, the object on which heart and will

were alike set, if Madeleine became a Catholic. So much he knew with absolute certainty. But there was a hope—again let it be noted, as a proof of how far he had wandered, that he distinctly thought of it as a hope—that this might be merely a fancy on her part, which would not carry her to the practical step of entering the Church. He was aware, as every Catholic is aware, how many people there are who, drawn by different attractions, linger as it were about the door of the Church of God, look in wistfully, admire its beauty, recognize its order, feel the haunting charm of its ritual, acknowledge the flawless logic of its doctrine, yet turn away at last without crossing the threshold; held by the ties and interests "of this present world," or unable to submit to the yoke of authority.

It was, he said to himself, most likely that this would be the case with Madeleine. In her loneliness and sadness, the mystic side of Catholicity had appealed to her; its marvellous beauty had fascinated the artistic temperament which she possessed in high degree; and no doubt the influence of the remarkable book and the majestic Cathedral which she had been studying counted for much. But could all together possibly overcome what was arrayed on the other side—the human love she must put away, the human ties she must renounce, the hated, repudiated bond she must, in spirit at least, once more

acknowledge? It appeared to him, as it had already appeared to Nina, incredible that such obstacles could be overcome, such sacrifices made; and when he heard of the incidents of the day before, and of the effect of those incidents on Madeleine, he was even more deeply convinced of this.

"As you have said," he remarked when Nina's narrative was ended, "it seems"—but here he paused, for how could he venture to call the occurrence "providential," as she had called it?—"it seems a very fortunate thing that those people should have crossed her path just at this time," he went on a little hastily. "It's as if it were intended to show her—"

Then, as he paused again, uncertain how to express exactly what it was intended to show her, Nina took up the unfinished sentence:

"What the consequences would be of allowing herself to be influenced and guided by the mystical and morbid fancies which have been in her mind of late. That is what I've tried to make plain to her. But I can't flatter myself that I have succeeded in producing much effect. So it seemed to me a really wonderful coincidence that you should come back into her life just when all the dreadfulness of the past had been vividly revived for her, and when she had been forced to realize what the horror would be of feeling herself

still bound to the man the mere sound of whose voice made her ill. *But*"—Miss Percival laid stress on that weighty word—"you must pardon me if I say frankly that there will not be much good in your coming if you show yourself unsympathetic, and—er—disagreeable toward her."

"I'm sorry if you think I could ever be wilfully disagreeable toward her," Maitland said. "But unsympathetic—how can I possibly sympathize with ideas which, if she continues to hold them, will keep us apart and ruin both our lives?"

Nina did not reply immediately. With her head on one side, she surveyed him meditatively for a minute before she said:

"I'm afraid you are hardly the kind of man to employ diplomacy even to gain your object."

"I'd employ anything to gain my object—if I knew how," he assured her.

"Ah!" She mused again. "And if I show you how," she queried then, "would you be willing to follow my advice?"

"I should not only be willing to follow, but very grateful for it," he promptly replied.

"In that case," she told him, "I advise you not to be discouraged by anything Madeleine may have said; for I assure you that she is not at all positively decided in her mind, however positively she may have expressed herself to you."

"She certainly expressed herself most positively," Maitland said.

"Yes, of course she would," Nina assented. "That was an instinct of defence directed as much against herself as against you. But even if she continues to express herself in that manner, don't be disheartened, don't look gloomy, or—if you'll again excuse my frankness—sulky; and don't demand an immediate decision on the point at issue between you. Who was it said, 'Time and I against any two'? Well, never mind!" (as Maitland shook his head to signify his inability to tell.) "It doesn't matter. But he was a wise man, for time and patience can work wonders. The devotion you have shown in following Madeleine will have its effect if you give it time to sink in. Make her feel the depth of this devotion, and spare no effort to impress on her the belief that she will ruin *your* life—that she will ruin her own you'll find no argument whatever—if she persists in her present fancies. But remember that you must deal gently with these fancies. Don't try to ride roughshod over them; and, above all, don't fall into the great mistake of allowing her to find another man more sympathetic than you are."

"It is easy for the other man to be sympathetic with fancies which don't affect him at all," Maitland said a little resentfully.

"Quite true," Nina agreed. "It is easy;

but, all the same, she will contrast his attitude with yours, to your disadvantage. That's human nature, you know; and not at all particularly feminine nature. We all like the people who agree with us; and when the agreement is on points which lie as deep as Madeleine's fancies—"

"But, as I have already reminded you, those fancies are the barriers she erects between us!" he cried. "Can't you see, therefore, that it is impossible for me to sympathize with them?"

Nina shrugged her shoulders.

"I see that if you don't, you will rouse in her a spirit of antagonism which will be fatal to all you desire," she warned him. "You must be diplomatic—"

"You mean deceitful?"

"No, Mr. Maitland, I don't mean deceitful," she replied, with dignity. "I mean something which is apparently too subtle for you to grasp. You are like most men: you make stupid blunders in dealing with women, and then you blame them for your own mistakes."

Maitland was on the point of retorting, "And you are like most women—impervious to reason" (for such, alas! are the ages-old opinions of the two sexes of each other); but wiser thought prevented his uttering the words. For he not only recognized the force of Nina's advice, but he knew that he had in her a strong ally, who was altogether on his side,

and anxious to help him as far as she possibly could. So he made haste to apologize for his last utterance.

"I didn't intend to be either uncivil or ungrateful," he assured her. "But I'm afraid I must plead guilty of stupidity. Probably what you mean *is* too subtle for me to grasp; but I'll do my best, if you will make it a little clearer; for, as it is, I am quite unable to perceive how I can sympathize with ideas which I am here to combat."

"But you do sympathize with them to some extent, do you not?" she asked. "Aren't you a Catholic?"

"Yes, I am a Catholic," he replied, somewhat startled by the abrupt question. "But what has that to do—"

"With the matter?" she ended, as he paused. "Why, everything! You understand—and what is sympathy but understanding?—these mystical fancies which have fascinated Madeleine so deeply; and you can point out to her, with the authority of one who knows, where and how she exaggerates their meaning and force. For I am sure she does exaggerate it all, poor dear! I've often heard Catholics say that you have always to reckon on *trop de zéle* in converts; and Madeleine is a convert in mind, if not in fact. She won't listen to me when I tell her that she carries her ideas to an unnecessary extreme. But she will listen to you for two reasons: first, because you are a Catholic and

are therefore supposed to know the practical side of your faith; and secondly—but I think I must leave you to guess the second reason, and you will be more stupid than you have represented yourself if you can't guess it."

Maitland, who in reality was not stupid at all, guessed the reason easily enough; and he felt his pulses beating more rapidly at this clear intimation that love for him would lend weight to whatever he might say, and prove the traitor in Madeleine's heart. And, in the tumult of feeling roused, he did not perceive how much of an *advocatus diaboli* (as Madeleine had called Nina herself) this suggestion, if carried out, would make of him. He was to use the prestige of his Catholicity to lessen the influence and minimize the teachings of the faith; and it was significant of the darkness which obscured the light of that faith in his own soul, that he was ready to undertake such a rôle. As for Nina, it may be said of her that she had little or no idea of what she was really suggesting; and so she had only an agreeable sense of a desirable and praiseworthy end attained when, in answer to her last words, Maitland said:

"However stupid I may be in some respects, I am not too stupid to appreciate how much help as well as encouragement you have given me; and I assure you that I am exceedingly grateful for both. I will do the best I can along the lines you've indicated; for of course

you must know the state of Mrs. Raynor's mind better than I can know it."

"She has always been what the French call *exalté* in the superlative degree," Nina informed him; "and therefore these ideas of renunciation and sacrifice have appealed to her very strongly. So we must fight them warily and, as I said at first, diplomatically. And now don't you think it would be well for you to join her in the Cathedral? I'm going over; for it seems as if she and Mr. Carruthers are disposed to spend the day there."

Maitland assented; and this conversation having taken place in the sitting-room of the lodgings which Nina and Madeleine shared, the two who had so thoroughly arrived at an understanding sallied forth together, and crossed the square to the Cathedral.

It was not the place Maitland would have chosen to seek Madeleine; but, since she had as it were taken refuge there, he had no alternative. Yet when he entered through the great sculptured portal into the vast interior, with its forest of massive pillars, its soaring roof, and the glorious fire of light and color from its splendid windows, he forgot for a moment the purpose for which he had come, and the soul of the Catholic expanded within him as he looked around the noble sanctuary. He knew little, and just now cared less, for all the wealth of art and symbolism which is

here enshrined; but the majesty of the superb church seemed to embody the majesty of the faith which had erected it; all the aspirations of man's soul toward the infinite and the eternal appeared to find expression in the springing arches, and all the piety of the Ages of Faith to be written in the marvellous windows, where, in type or in person, the Mother of God stands enthroned, reigning triumphant in this sanctuary, which is more perfectly and entirely dedicated to her than any other church on earth. Had Maitland been familiar with that book of Huysmans which Madeleine knew so well, he might have recalled some of its glowing words, as he first trod the pavement of Notre Dame de Chartres, and cried with its author:

"How grandiose and how aerial was this Cathedral, sprung like a jet from the soul of a man who had formed it in his own image, to record his ascent in mystic paths, up and up by degrees in the light; passing through the contemplative life in the transept, soaring in the choir into the full glory of the unitive life, far away now from the purgatorial life, the dark passage of the nave!

"And this assumption of a soul was attended, supported, by the bands of angels, the apostles, the prophets, and the righteous; all arrayed in their glorified bodies of flame,—an escort of honor to the cross lying low on the stones, and the image of the Mother enthroned in all

the high places of this vast reliquary; opening the walls, as it seemed, to present to her, as for a perpetual festival their posies of gems that had blossomed in the fiery heat of the glass windows.

"Nowhere else was the Virgin so well cared for, so cherished, so emphatically proclaimed the absolute mistress of the realm thus offered to her; and one detail proved this. In every other cathedral, kings, saints, bishops, and benefactors lay buried in the depths of the soil; not so at Chartres. Not a body has ever been buried there; this church has never been made a sarcophagus, because, as one of its historians—old Rouillard—says, 'it has the pre-eminent distinction of being the couch or bed of the Virgin.'

"Thus it was her home; here she was supreme amid the court of her elect, watching over the sacramental Body of her Son in the sanctuary of the inmost chapel, where lamps were ever burning; guarding Him as she had done in His infancy; holding Him on her knee in every carving, every painted window; seen in every story of the building, between the ranks of saints; and sitting at last on a pillar, revealing herself to the poor and lowly, under the humble aspect of a sunburned woman, scorched by the dog-days, tanned by wind and rain. Nay, she went lower still, down to the cellars of her palace, waiting in the crypt to give audience to the waverers—the timid

souls who were abashed by the sunlit splendor of her court.

"How completely does this sanctuary, where is ever felt the sweet and awful presence of the Child who never leaves His Mother, lift the spirit above all realities, into the secret rapture of pure beauty!"

It seemed as if this "secret rapture of pure beauty" was expressed in Madeleine's face when Maitland found her at last, with Carruthers, in the south transept; for no sooner had she crossed its threshold than the spell of the Cathedral fell upon her again. The evil ghosts of yesterday, which she feared to find there, had either fled away or lost their power to distress. And she did not attempt to ask the reason of this,—to analyze her emotions, or to decide how much the change of feeling was due to the influence of the church where she had found such divine peace, or to the pervading consciousness of an enveloping human love,—of a devotion which had followed her over land and sea. But it was not strange that the heart which always so passionately craved love, should find satisfaction in this devotion, even though she had been forced to pain the man who brought the rich gift, and to deny the suit he came to urge. Whether denied or not, the gift remained; and her whole being was absorbed in gratitude for it; and also in that sense of exalted happiness which the presence of one beloved can inspire

in the hearts that God has wonderfully formed to know such happiness.

What did it matter that this love could not have its earthly gratification in nearness of companionship and oneness of life? She was dreaming of a union of soul with soul, as she walked down the pillared aisles, under the soaring arches, in the jewelled light of the windows; thinking of love as a fire, near which one cold and almost frozen might draw for warmth and comfort; unaware, poor Madeleine! of its power to scorch and burn.

And so it was in this gentle and grateful mood, with the light of a feeling to which Nina's term *exalté* could well be applied, shining in her eyes, that she turned to meet Maitland's appealing gaze, which seemed to express the passionate ardor of a soul capable of grasping the high ideal that was in her own.

CHAPTER VIII.

NINA congratulated herself upon the effect of her admonitions, when she saw the exemplary manner in which Maitland conducted himself after joining Madeleine in the Cathedral; and it did not occur to her that possibly the change in him was due less to those admonitions than to the influence of the great church which he had entered with so little thought, but which had, as it were, seized his spirit and compelled it to the reverence he was ready to forget. For the moment, at least, the passion of rebellion which possessed his soul died down, as the waves of stormy water were once stilled by the command of their Lord. No doubt those waves rose again, after the gracious and powerful Presence had passed from them; but at His voice they subsided and were calm. And it was the same voice, with the same unearthly accent of command, which now spoke to the tumult of Maitland's heart in the atmosphere of this old sanctuary of faith,—that wonderful atmosphere which, like the never-dying fragrance of incense, dwells in these ancient churches where for long ages the Holy Sacrifice has been offered, and where the very walls seem saturated with the un-

ceasing prayer poured forth within them by myriads of pious souls.

It would have been impossible for Maitland to be altogether insensible to this influence, even though, like too many Catholics of his day and generation, and especially of his country, he knew little of the spiritual side of his religion. And if this seems a contradiction of terms, in speaking of a religion which is based wholly upon the spiritual, it is because there is no other way of describing the condition of those who, while holding all the truths necessary for salvation, are yet strangely blind to supernatural values; and in whom the influence of a world absorbed in the pursuit of material things—which regards nothing else as worthy of effort, which accepts no religion other than a thinly-veiled humanitarianism, and cares for no charity save that which ministers to man's bodily needs—has done its work in a subtle and often deadly fashion.

For such people turn with an almost Protestant distaste from any note of high spirituality. They want only what is "practical" in religion, and that reduced to a minimum; they compound with the world, as far as they possibly can, in all its beliefs and practices; and when at last some great temptation assails them, they find no weapon with which to repel it in the faith they have attenuated to suit the demands of the society in which they live. Considering these things, one is often

inclined to think that if, perhaps, there were less boasting over the growth of Catholicity in America, and more recognition of the danger which the dominant materialism of American life presents, it might be better in the end for the Church, which, however great her apparent prosperity, must inevitably suffer in her most vital point when her children forget how far the things of the spirit transcend in value the things of the material world.

This is a truth which was never more fully grasped than by the men of those ages which the world calls "dark," and *we* the Ages of Faith. No interests of life, no warring strife of the times, blinded their eyes to the great Vision of celestial things, of exalted ideals, of man's true end and destiny. Hence there blossomed forth such fair fruits of noble deeds, of heroic virtues, of a splendid, almost prodigal generosity toward God's Church and God's poor, as have never been surpassed, and are not likely ever to be equalled. And, human nature being what it is, we might possibly doubt the records which tell of these marvellous works, if there was not another record in the great monuments of faith bequeathed to us by those ages, when man's genius seemed inspired by the creative power of God to rise to heights of achievement which it has never since attained. It rose to no greater height than in this glorious Cathedral of Chartres; and as we recall the exquisite and truly med-

iæval story of its building, of how "no man was so audacious as to lay hands on the materials belonging to the Virgin till he had made peace with his enemies and confessed his sins," we can not wonder that miracles of grace should still occur within its walls.

It is not, however, meant to be implied that such a miracle of grace occurred with Maitland. There was no flash of divine illumination to show him the nature of the peril in which he stood; only, as has been said, a powerful touch seemed laid upon his spirit. And, with a sense of quiet to which that spirit had been for many days a stranger, he found himself walking with Madeleine about the great church (for Nina soon carried Carruthers off to examine her picture), pausing to kneel at the different shrines, and at last following her to that most ancient and famous shrine in the crypt, of Notre Dame de Sous-Terre.

And if the upper church is full of memories, what can be said of this underground basilica, the history of which goes back to a past so dim that it is lost in the mists of legend? Yet on one point tradition has been through all the ages constant and clear: we are told that the Cathedral is built above a Druidical cave, which is the first place where the Virgin was venerated in France. "It goes back," writes Huysmans, "to Messianic times; for, long before Joachim's daughter was born, the Druids had erected, in the cave which has become our

crypt, an altar to the Virgin who should bear a Child—*Virgini Parituræ.* They, by a sort of grace, had intuitive foreknowledge of a Saviour whose Mother should be spotless; thus it would seem that at Chartres, above all places, there are very ancient bonds of affection with Mary." He then goes on to relate the history—too long for insertion here—of the successive churches which, from the remote dawn of Christianity, have been built above this cave. Destroyed again and again by the warfare of men, and also by the lightning of heaven, the present Cathedral is the fifth erection over the ancient crypt. Built in the thirteenth century, by a spontaneous outpouring of love and generosity from the people, who came in multitudes to give to its erection not only their means but their personal labor as well, it is not alone the noblest expression of the faith of the age which built it, but there are, besides, a thousand hallowing memories associated with these walls, which, rising in the reign of Philippe Augustus, were consecrated in the presence of St. Louis in 1260.

"Really," cries Huysmans, "when you come to think of it, a cathedral is a superhuman thing! Starting in our lands from the old Roman crypt, from the vault, crushed like the soul by humility and fear, and bowed before the infinite Majesty whose praise they hardly dared to sing, the churches gradually waxed bolder; they gave an upward spring to

the semicircular arch, lengthening it to an almond shape, leaping from the earth, uplifting roofs, heightening naves, breaking out into a thousand-sculptured forms all round the choir; and flinging heavenward, like prayers, their rapturous piles of stones. They symbolized the loving tenderness of orisons; they became more trusting, more playful, more daring in the sight of God."

No words could better describe the Cathedral of Chartres as it stands to-day,—the thirteenth century upper church 'flinging heavenward, like prayers, its rapturous piles of stones,' above the solemn crypt in which the Romanesque is seen in its earliest and most typical form. And again we may let the poet and mystic tell us what deep, strange things he saw and felt in this underground sanctuary. "Overhead," he says, "the enormous curve of the vaulting hung heavy, and so low that a man could touch it by stretching an arm; it was as black as the mouth of a chimney, and scorched by the fires that had consumed the cathedrals built above it. . . . The cavern was crowded with memories. The coatings of these walls had been formed of the vapors of the soul, of the exhalations of accumulated desires and regrets, even more than of the smoke and tapers. An extraordinarily mild atmosphere prevailed, which was also full of a singular perfume, in which a musty odor of hot wax mingled with a suggestion of damp

earth. But this was only the background—the canvas, so to speak—of the perfume, and was lost under the embroidery of fragrance which covered it: the faded gold, as it were, of oil in which long-kept aromatic herbs had been steeped, and old, old incense powder dissolved. It was a weird and mysterious vapor, as strange as the crypt itself, which, with its furtive lights and breadths of shadow, was at once penitential and soothing."

And then, as part of the description of early Mass in the crypt, he adds: "A sacristan came in through a little door opening into the other transept, and lighted the tapers on the high altar; then strings of silver-gilt hearts became visible in the semicircle all along the walls, reflecting the blaze of flames, and forming a glory for a statue of the Virgin sitting, stiff and dark, with a Child on her knees. This was the famous Virgin of the Cavern—or rather a copy of it; for the original was burned in 1793 in front of the great porch of the Cathedral, amid the delirious raving of *sans-culottes*."

No sacristan came out to light the candles when Madeleine and Maitland knelt before this ancient shrine, for the Masses of the day were long over; and as much light as ever enters into the underground basilica was filling the great spaces, showing the heavy vaulting, the massive pillars, the immense blocks of smoke-blackened stone. The spot where Notre

Dame de Sous-Terre sat was obscure, as became the name and origin of the famous image. But the stiff dark figure was clearly to be seen; and the gleam of the votive hearts which formed a background for it seemed visible symbols of the love and reverence which from earliest ages have here been paid to the stainless Mother of God.

It is not well to inquire too closely what prayers were said by the two who knelt side by side on the low chairs, in the dim light which came through distant, clouded windows. On Madeleine's part, it was probably a thanksgiving for the peace which seemed restored to her soul, and for the dream of an earthly but exalted happiness which had dawned on her; but it is doubtful if any articulate form of prayer rose in Maitland's mind. He was only conscious of the same powerful influence, strongly intensified, which had calmed the tumult of his spirit in the upper church. And although, with the crass materialism of his day, he would probably have scorned the mysticism of Huysmans had he known of it, nevertheless that "mysterious vapor"—that atmosphere which the ages have left here, and which the impressionable soul of the mystic found "at once penitential and soothing"—had its effect on him. In the deep silence of these low vaults, the world seems to recede to an immeasurable distance, the sense of eternity to brood almost visibly; and, whether

formulated or not, the prayer that rises most instinctively to the soul of man is the old, old cry, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

But, despite, or perhaps because of, the awe which this solemn and austere crypt inspires, there can be no doubt of the sense of relief with which Maitland left it. For in the background of his mind the purpose which had brought him so far remained unchanged; and the influence that for a time had bidden the stormy waves of passion be still, was an influence which has never yet compelled the will of man—that proud and unique creation of God, which He has left free in order that there may be merit in its submission.

Nevertheless, Notre Dame de Sous-Terre had in some degree done her work; and it was a very subdued Maitland who again walked by Madeleine's side through the glories of the upper church, and came with her out to the statue-set porch, where they found Nina and Carruthers awaiting them.

"You've been so long that we had some thought of going in search of you!" the former cried as soon as she saw them. "But I knew where you were, and I can not bear that crypt. I feel as if the weight of all the earth and all the ages fell on my spirit when I enter it; and how Madeleine can like to go there, I am unable to imagine. Did *you* like it?" she asked abruptly, turning to Maitland.

He hesitated before answering; and it

occurred to her that he would not have hesitated had the question been asked a little earlier—for instance, when they stood by the river and he declared so emphatically his liking for "things that belong to daylight," which the crypt of the Cathedral of Chartres most certainly does not.

"It is very interesting," he said at last; "but undoubtedly gloomy, and some people might even find it depressing."

"I'm one of the 'some people,'" Nina declared. ("And, if you expressed your true sentiments, you'd acknowledge that you are another!" she added mentally.) "I'm not fond of gloomy or depressing things; and going into that crypt is like descending into a tomb to meditate on one's last end."

"A very useful exercise," said Madeleine.

"Perhaps so," Nina agreed; "but distinctly *not* cheerful, and I am for cheerfulness always. Which reminds me that the most cheerful thing I can think of just now is *dejeuner*, and we are all going to take it together. Dick and I have arranged everything. So *allons!*"

The others offering no objection, they therefore took *dejeuner* together, as Nina and Carruthers had arranged while waiting; and each member of the little party contributed a sufficient quota of cheerfulness to make the occasion pleasant to all. Miss Percival's spirits were, in fact, high enough to warrant a suspicion that, despite her modernity, she was

exhilarated in quite an old-fashioned way by the presence of the young artist from Paris; while Carruthers himself was one of those fortunate and popular persons who can invariably be relied on for good-fellowship,—a light-hearted comrade, who, up to the present time at least, had always taken the road of life singing blithely.

If the other two members of the quartette were not so gay as these, that was not remarkable. The consciousness of a strained situation, of vital and poignant issues hanging on decisions yet to be made, could not be banished altogether by either, though each endeavored to act as if the difficult feat had been accomplished. And indeed in great measure the strain was relaxed for Madeleine. To her, too, Notre Dame de Sous-Terre had spoken; and if she did not altogether understand the message which had come to her soul—a message of strength it seemed, though for what hard combat she did not guess,—it conveyed a sense of tranquillity as well as of power, which deepened the peace that had already brought its healing balm to her heart. How much this peace rested on a dream of ethe-realized human love—a pathetic attempt to compromise with the hard fate that barred her from the natural order of happiness—she did not yet understand, though it was soon to be made clear to her. For the present, however, the sweetness and magic of the

dream was all about her, shining in her eyes and irradiating her whole expression, as happiness alone has power to do, until every one of the little group saw and recognized the change in her.

That the meaning of this change should have been misunderstood by each of them was only natural. Maitland's heart leaped up with the hope that his suit, if not won, was at least near to success; for how else could he interpret the radiance which but once before—when he first spoke of his love on a day that now seemed long past—he had seen in Madeleine's look? Nina was as glad as she was surprised; for she had feared a much longer and harder struggle with "misplaced idealism"; and Carruthers was unable to keep his artist's gaze from dwelling persistently on the face, where the light of that emotion which, though it often chains the soul to earth can also give it wings to mount beyond the sun and stars, shone so transparently that he said to himself, "I should like to paint her as Psyche wakened by Eros."

He said as much also to Nina when, after their *dejeuner*, in the still beauty of the summer afternoon, they all again wandered down to the river flowing through the ancient moat, and, crossing it by one of its many bridges, went out into the country beyond. While the two artists paused now and then for slight sketching, Madeleine and Maitland gradually drew

farther ahead, as they strolled along a road—one of the perfect roads of France—which led between cultivated lands across the wide plain of La Beauce.

"Yes," Nina agreed, in answer to Carruthers' remark, "she looked absolutely lovely; and so irradiated by some inner feeling—and there's only one that can irradiate the human countenance in such fashion—that I don't wonder you felt that you would like to paint her. But if you did, you would certainly

paint her unaware
With a halo round her hair;

for didn't it strike you that she looked even more like a saint, exalted by some heavenly vision, than like a woman in love with an ordinary man?"

"No," Carruthers answered positively. "She didn't look at all like a saint to me; but, as I said, like Psyche wakened by Eros. Her eyes—what beautiful eyes she has!—seemed full of wonder as well as of radiance, as if she were marvelling over the dawn of some new feeling, the birth of some new faculty. I'd give anything to be able to catch that expression!" (he made a gesture in the air, as if holding a brush.) "But I never could," he added, with a drop of voice and arm; "for it is in its nature too transitory."

"Now, what do you mean to imply by that?" Nina asked suspiciously.

"That no such exalted state of feeling ever

lasts, whether it is the vision of a saint or the rapture of a woman in love with what you call scornfully 'an ordinary man,'" he replied. "We are so made, you know, that to remain on heights is impossible to us; neither the soul nor the body can breathe rarefied air for long."

"Dick, you've got a great deal more sense than one would be inclined to give you credit for," Nina remarked with uncomplimentary frankness. "That is quite true of the most of us; but let me tell you that Madeleine comes nearer to breathing the rarefied air of such heights all the time than any one else I ever knew."

"I've not the least doubt of that," he returned. "But it is true only in comparative degree—comparative, that is, with the low levels where the rest of us breathe most comfortably,—while what we have just seen was the outward sign of an emotion which, being superlative in its exaltation, can not last any more than the wonderful glow of dawn can last through the day."

"But the glow of dawn heralds the sunlight which *will* last through the day," Nina cried quickly; "and I believe that a happiness which may last, has indeed come into Madeleine's life. No one deserves it more."

"I am quite sure of that also," Carruthers said. "But—I don't wish to make unpleasant suggestions, yet the thought forces itself—do those who most deserve happiness generally

find it? My observation of life tells me otherwise."

"So does mine," Nina admitted; "but 'generally' is not 'always.' Sometimes those who deserve happiness find it."

"Certainly," Carruthers agreed. "I can honestly describe myself as happy, and there's no doubt of my deserving to be so, I hope."

"Not the least doubt," Nina assured him, with a laugh. "And I'm happy, too, for that matter. But, O Dick, how different our kind of happiness from Madeleine's! It is because she is made of such superfine clay—like a vessel formed only for the highest and most exquisite uses—that I am afraid for her."

Carruthers nodded.

"You've cause to be," he said. "Vessels of such superfine clay don't, as a rule, find happiness in the common uses of life. But we are really dreadfully analytical, and our similes are becoming fearfully mixed; so let us simply hope, in commonplace language, that Mrs. Raynor will continue to be as happy as she looked at lunch; and that she and Maitland have satisfactorily 'hit it off,' as our English friends say."

"I hope so," Nina echoed, with an anxious glance at the two figures walking ahead. "Oh, I *do* hope so with all my heart!"

CHAPTER IX.

CONDITIONS with the two in front were not, however, so idyllic as they appeared to the two in the rear. It had not been in accordance with Madeleine's desire that the little party separated in this manner; but, since chance brought it about, she was anxious that there should be no renewal of discussion on the point so vitally at issue between herself and Maitland. Nevertheless, that point, after the fashion of such points, persisted in obtruding itself,—as when Madeleine, having inquired about Mrs. Maitland, ventured timidly to hope that the latter had become Mrs. Wynne, her son's face clouded ominously.

"If she has changed her name or her condition," he said coldly, "I am not aware of the fact."

Madeleine turned a quick, startled glance on him.

"Oh, I hope that she has changed both!" she exclaimed involuntarily. "And how strange that you should be ignorant of anything concerning her, or speak in that tone of her!" she added, with wondering reproach. "To think of having such a mother and not valuing her!"

"No one could value a mother more than I have always valued mine," Maitland replied a little resentfully. "Indeed, I believe that it was because I have always valued her so highly—been, in fact, so devoted to her—that she thought she could interfere with impunity in my affairs, and, as far as lay in her power, destroy the happiness of my life."

"How can you be so unjust to her!" Madeleine cried, with the same note of reproach in her voice. "You know that her only object in interfering in your affairs was to save you from a great mistake, and that she felt bound in conscience to try to do this."

"She may have felt bound in conscience," he answered; "but I don't for a moment admit that she had on that account any right to act as she did, or that she saved me from a great mistake. How could I admit the last? Nothing would be a mistake which gave me your companionship for life."

She looked at him wistfully.

"But life is not all," she said. "And you would purchase the companionship at the price of great renunciations."

"I am ready to make them," he declared firmly.

"But I am not ready to accept them," she told him with equal firmness. "*That* was settled as soon as my eyes were opened to the true nature of the sacrifice you would have to make. I was altogether ignorant of

this until your mother enlightened me. But when I understood, all I desired then was to go away—and endeavor to forget that the dream of an impossible happiness had ever dawned on me. So I went, in pursuit of a vision which had come to me as a revelation; and a new and different peace seemed settling upon my soul, when—when—"

"I came!"

"You were not the first." Her eyes looked at him now, dark with pain. "Others came, like evil emanations out of the dreadful past; and, as I had learned from your mother that I was not free to marry you unless I wished to do you the greatest possible injury, so I learned now that I was not free in any respect, but that in the sight of God I stand to-day as much fettered to the man whose voice filled my whole soul with loathing as when I first uttered the vows that bound me to him."

An angry flush surged over Maitland's face.

"It is not true!" he exclaimed violently. "You are not bound to him. It is sheer fanaticism to say so. And you must not believe it for a moment. The laws of your country have declared that you are free, and you *are* free."

"But the laws of God are above the laws of man, and the Catholic Church declares that marriage once entered into can not be dissolved except by death."

He frowned; and Nina's words recurred to him, as if some spirit of evil had whispered them into his ear: "You are a Catholic; you understand the teachings of the Church; and you can point out to her, with the authority of one who knows, where and how far she exaggerates their meaning and force." Almost, as it seemed, without his own volition, he found himself saying:

"That is true, so far as it goes; but what you are not aware of is that there are so many causes which, according to the laws of the Catholic Church, annul marriage—that is, declare it invalid from the first—that there is a strong chance that your divorce is good, because in the eyes of the Church your marriage was not valid."

"Ah, if that were only possible!" A light of hope shone for an instant on her face, and then died down. She shook her head. "But I'm sure that it is not," she said. "We were both free to marry. There was no obstacle of any kind."

"You can't tell," Maitland persisted. "There may have been some obstacle; it is a question for theologians. At least I am willing to take the risk; and, since you are not a Catholic, it doesn't concern you—"

"I have told you that in belief I am a Catholic."

"But that doesn't make the laws of the Church binding on you. You are perfectly

free to marry me, and I beg you to do so. I beg you not only to make me happy, but to give me the chance to make you happy; and, above all, to put the barrier of a real marriage between yourself and the brute who has made you suffer in the past, so that you may never again feel as you did when you heard his voice yesterday."

She did not answer immediately, and his heart leaped with the hope that she was yielding; for her eyes, as she gazed straight before her into the distance, seemed filled with the reflected radiance of the vision which his words had conjured up,—that vision of earthly happiness which has such power to allure our poor hearts, and the desire of which no disappointment is able to eradicate. To Madeleine's nature, so formed to love and to spend itself on things beloved, it was especially alluring; and like a picture it seemed spread before her: the dream of a happiness which should be secure and stable, built on love and trust and faithfulness; of the tender sanctities of home; of children's eyes and voices; of all the common human joys—common as sunlight, and, like sunlight, bringing something of heaven into the world—which God has given to sweeten human existence. For a moment she lost herself in dreaming of this happiness; and then, as if by a flash of lightning, the picture at which she was gazing was rent in twain, and a voice seemed saying to her soul,

"That is not possible without the blessing of God. Grasp at happiness without His blessing, and you will find only misery for yourself and another."

The radiance died out of her eyes, she drew her breath in a long, deep sigh—the sigh which speaks more eloquently than words of renunciation—and turned toward Maitland.

"If you knew how much you tempt me, and how painful the temptation is, you would not try me so hardly," she said. "For I can not yield. I can give you no other answer than I have given from the first—which is, that I will never make myself a barrier between you and your religion. I know that you have told me this is not my affair, and you are ready to tell me so again" (Maitland had indeed opened his lips angrily); "but there I differ with you. It is emphatically my affair; and if I had no more knowledge of, or belief in, the Catholic Faith than I had when your mother came to me, I should still feel it so. I will not play the part you wish me to play. I will not let you make of me an influence to turn you from high ways into lower ones; to cut you off from the Church, to force you to live without the sacraments—"

"You force me to tell you, once for all, that you are interfering with things with which you have no concern!" he interrupted. "My soul is my own, and my relations with the Church are between myself and the eccle-

siastical authorities. I have no fear that I can not arrange things satisfactorily, if you would only trust me."

"Does that mean if I would marry you?"

"Yes, it means just that. Marry me, and then we will lay the case of your first marriage before those who can decide on its validity."

"My poor friend," she said gently, "how hard you try to deceive yourself—for I do not wish to believe that you are trying to deceive me! Yet it is clear that if you had any real hope that my marriage was invalid, you would settle that point before you asked me to marry you."

"You don't understand!" he cried impatiently. "These things are matters of time—often of immense time. They don't know what haste is in Rome! And I want you, Madeleine! I want to make your life happy and secure; and, above all, I want you—*you!*"

"Yes, I know." Again she sighed. "We want each other, and it is very sad that the desire of our hearts can not be gratified. If we could live our lives together with the blessing of God, it would be happiness greater than words can express. But since we can not do this—since there would be no real happiness possible for us under such circumstances—"

"There would be for me," he interposed obstinately.

"I think not," she told him. "I think that you do yourself injustice in believing so. But

if we can not join our lives in the ordinary way, and make a home together," she went on, "it has come to me as a dream perhaps—but a very consoling dream—that we can find comfort and happiness in a spiritual friendship which may be very perfect and give us both much happiness. We can see each other often, we can be a source of consolation and inspiration to each other; and so life may be brightened and made beautiful by mutual love and help, even though we may never be able to be more than friends in the highest and deepest sense."

She gazed at him with the sweetness and high spirituality of the dream which had come to her shining eyes; but even before he spoke she saw that there was no response to such dreaming in him.

"That," he said, "is like offering a man a snow-wreath when he asks for bread. Such fine-spun fancies are not for real human life. No, Madeleine, you can't make any such friend out of me. I am an ordinary man of flesh and blood; and I don't want spiritual aid and help and comfort; I want you yourself in my life, in my home, in my heart, and nothing less will content me."

"But if you can not have that?" she cried appealingly.

"Then I will have nothing," he answered. "Put your mystical fancies away. They have no part to play between us. No compromise

is possible in our situation. I have come to ask you to set all other considerations aside, and marry me; and if you refuse to do this, I will go out of your life, and never trouble you again."

Then, brave as she was, a human, almost childlike cry broke from Madeleine.

"How can you talk of leaving me," she said, "when you know how lonely, how desolate I am?"

He was quick to see and press his advantage.

"I will never leave you, if you will let me stay," he replied; "but I can stay only if you will consent to marry me."

And there the matter ended for the time, as at this moment Nina and Carruthers overtook and rejoined them. If the former had guessed in the least degree how fortunate, from her point of view, the intervention was which left Maitland's ultimatum unanswered, she would not have felt the regret she did for interrupting the conversation. But to avoid doing so was impossible; and the four soon turned around and took their way back to Chartres, where the great mass of the Cathedral dominated the city, its towers pointing heavenward like the prayer-joined hands of a Crusader in his last sleep.

It appeared that the two young men intended to return to Paris the next day; and as the party dined and spent the evening together, it was very soon clear to Nina's

keen perceptions that nothing had been settled between Madeleine and the man who had come so far to seek her. Under the composure of each, uneasiness was evident,—so evident that when they finally separated for the night, and the two friends were alone in the apartment which they shared, Nina could not restrain her desire to learn how matters really stood.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to ask questions," she said abruptly to Madeleine, "but to wait until you are ready to tell me whatever you wish to tell. Yet I am so interested—and you know why I am interested—that I can't help asking if you have any good news for me?"

Madeleine looked at her with a faint, sad smile.

"No, dear Nina!" she answered. "I have no news that you would call good."

"You haven't" (the tone was almost threatening)—"you haven't *bad* news surely? Madeleine, you dare not tell me that you have rejected this man who is so devoted to you, who has come to offer you such a chance to put the past behind you and be happy at last!"

"Nina," Madeleine said gravely, "have you forgotten that I asked you once before whether, in your knowledge of me, you thought it possible that I could be happy if I made myself an influence of evil rather than good in a man's life?"

"I haven't forgotten; and I answer now as I answered then, that of course you couldn't be happy if you really believed such a thing. But I add now as I added then, that I don't see why you should believe it."

"No, I don't suppose you see why I should believe it," Madeleine said a little wearily; "and it is useless for me to try to make you see. So you must just believe that it is impossible for me to act otherwise than I have done, and that is all."

"Is it all? Are you really going to send away this man who cares so much for you?"

It seemed for a moment difficult for Madeleine to answer. Then—

"I have no choice but to do so," she said in a low voice.

"And yet" (Nina was looking at her keenly) "I could have sworn, when we were all at *dejeuner*, that you were happy in his presence, and that you saw hope of continued happiness in the future. What has changed you since then?"

"Nothing has changed *me*," Madeleine answered; "but I have found that the hope of happiness which you are right in thinking that I fancied I saw, was only a dream."

"What kind of a dream?"

"A very foolish one, no doubt. I seemed to have a sudden glimpse of what a lovely thing it would be if he and I could remain just friends, but friends in the closest and

dearest sense; if his devotion could comfort my heart, and I might perhaps inspire and help him in his life's work, and—and so we might be almost as much to each other as if we were really married. It was a very beautiful fancy" (she sighed softly), "but I found it was nothing more."

"I should think not!" Nina's tone was almost contemptuously emphatic. "The idea of expecting any man to be content with such a compromise as that! O Madeleine, what a dreamer of dreams you are! And did you tell him of this fancy of yours? And what did he say?"

"Just what you have said—that I am a foolish dreamer of dreams; and that, if I do not agree to marry him, he will go altogether out of my life."

"And will you let him go?"

The face which Madeleine turned toward her was full of piteous appeal. "How can I prevent it?" the great dark eyes seemed to ask, but the lips answered nothing; and a moment later she rose and went hastily away to bed.

But going to bed is one thing and going to sleep quite another; and during the long hours of the night sleep was never kind enough to visit Madeleine's tired eyes and mind and heart. All night long she lay staring at the barren past, or down the dull vista of the hopeless future. All light seemed to have left her soul; no vision of any kind came to solace

its misery or give promise of healing for pain. It seemed as if the dream of human happiness had for the time entirely banished the vision of celestial things,—of peace which no storm of earth could disturb. And, although the former had vanished like a mirage, the other did not return; and the desert of life appeared to stretch before her, arid and desolate.

And then a great storm of temptation arose. "This is folly!" something seemed telling her with scorn. "Why not take what is offered you—the human love, the natural human life of happiness? What do you gain by making yourself and another wretched? What right have you to decide for him in a matter where he has a right to judge for himself; and with regard to the demands of his religion, which he must know better than you can? You are an idealist and a fool; and when you have sent him away beyond recall, you will spend your life in regretting what you have done. Your promise to his mother? You have tried to keep that, and it is not your fault that you are not able to do so. The coin of sacrifice? That is merely a phrase, standing for a mystical idea which struck your fancy. There can be no such thing. Those are right who say that no one can pay for another: that sacrifices are useless and foolish. You have but one life to live: take what is offered to make it happy while you can do so. The chance will not come twice."

This was beyond bearing; for the inner voice grew more and more insistent, and all other voices were silent. It was as if in a great stillness the soul were left alone to battle with the temptation which assailed it. In desperation Madeleine rose and looked out of the window near her bed. Day was breaking in the eastern sky; but, in the obscurity which still lingered below, she saw a lantern in the hand of a dark figure moving across the *place*. Like a star it gleamed along the shadow-set ways until it finally vanished under the great portal of the Cathedral; and a sudden realization of what it meant rushed over her. Some one was going to the early Mass in the crypt,—that Mass so feelingly described by Huysmans; and, as a child who flies to its mother for help and protection against danger, her heart cried out that she, too, would go. She would fly to the feet of Notre Dame de Sous-Terre in her ancient shrine, and beg from her a sign of light and leading, to steady the soul so sore beset.

CHAPTER X.

MADELEINE felt as if she were in truth following in the footsteps of Durtal—that prototype of his author—when she closed the door of the house softly behind her, and started across the *place*, where darkness still lingered, though dawn was growing brighter in the east. She had no light; but just as she stepped to the pavement, another lantern-bearing figure came around the corner of one of the streets opening into the square, and she followed close behind him—for that it was a priest the flapping soutane and broad-brimmed hat indicated,—until, like Durtal, she felt the warm, scented air, so different from the daylight chill outside strike on her face as she followed her guide into "the solemn gloom of the sheltering forest" of enormous pillars within the Cathedral, and thence down the stairs which led to the mysterious region of the crypt.

Mysterious indeed it seemed at this hour, the vast underground world, so dimly lighted, so full of shadows, and fuller yet of memories of its far-reaching past. Had Madeleine been thinking of such things, she might have remembered the vast army of spirits of those who once worshipped here in the flesh, that might

have seemed lurking in the faintly illuminated darkness under the smoke-blackened vaults. From the ancient Druids who honored in anticipation the Virgin whom primeval tradition foretold, down the long line of kings and queens of once Catholic France, with all the great multitude of the faithful of all ages, they might well have been fancied here again, in the gloom which surrounded the sanctuary, where the light of wax tapers shone on the stiffly seated figure of her whom all generations have declared blessed among women.

At another time these recollections would have thronged upon Madeleine; but now she hardly thought of them, for her attention was centred on the battle still raging within herself. As she knelt on one of the low chairs—provided as a concession to modern weakness in Continental churches, and surely better than the un-Catholic pews of England and America—she herself made a picture which might have fascinated the eyes of an artist. Had Carruthers seen her then, he surely would have painted her

> unaware
> With a halo round her hair;

for she would have looked to him less like Psyche wakened by Eros than like some young Christian of the early Church preparing for martyrdom. The low, dark vaults and pillars about her were suggestive of the Roman

Catacombs; and all the passion of a life-and-death struggle between the forces of earth and heaven was expressed in the dark, dilated eyes, which gazed so fixedly at the altar, and at the image of her who sat enthroned behind it. But there was no one who observed her. The groups that came and went as one Mass followed another were all absorbed in their own devotions, and paid no attention whatever to the slender figure kneeling so motionlessly, until at last exhaustion overpowered her, and she sank back in the chair behind that on which she had knelt.

Roused now from her absorption, she saw that daylight had entered even this subterranean basilica; and the deep shadows, with the ghosts they sheltered, had mostly fled. A sacristan was putting out the candles: there would be no more Masses to-day at this altar. So rising, with a look of faint reproach at Notre Dame de Sous-Terre—for her soul was still dry as dust,—she slowly made her way to the upper world.

The sound of a clock striking the hour, as she reached the Cathedral porch, told her that it was even later than she imagined; and that Nina would be impatiently waiting her return, that they might take their *petit dejeuner* together as usual. But, notwithstanding this fact, she felt an intense reluctance to leave the church,—a reluctance more intense than she ever remembered to have felt before.

If she had remembered the mediæval law of sanctuary, she might have fancied herself one of those who for some real or imputed crime had taken refuge within the consecrated building, and dared not cross its threshold for fear of foes lurking without.

She had certainly a sense of dangers awaiting her, against which she felt no longer strength to contend. If she met Maitland again, she was sure that she would not be able to bid him leave her; and, although she knew that it was impossible to avoid meeting him—that if she did not go out he would come to seek her,—she felt that, if the final struggle must come, there were forces here which might rouse themselves to help her—if she stayed within the sheltering walls. But not if she went away. Of that she was quite sure. "Stay!" an imperative voice seemed bidding her: no more than that; but, like a child clinging to its mother's robe, she obeyed the instinct. She turned abruptly from the entrance, re-entered the great church, with its forest of soaring columns; and, going to a well-known spot, cast herself down at the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar.

"Mother of Mercy, here I am!" she said. "Help me, for I can no longer help myself."

It is hardly likely that such a cry of human faith and feebleness ever went unanswered. Certainly it was not unanswered now, although the answer came in a form such as Madeleine

in her wildest dreams could never have imagined. And, as a matter of fact, it came almost immediately; for some one had seen and recognized her, as she stood irresolutely in the porch. She had not observed this person, who was in a "fiacre" which at that moment entered the *place*, driving from the railway station toward a hotel; but when she turned and vanished into the church, the "fiacre" was abruptly halted by its occupant, and its course directed to the Cathedral door.

Ten minutes after it drew up there, a hand was laid on Madeleine's shoulder as she knelt at the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar; and when she looked up, expecting to see Nina, she found herself gazing into a face which she had never thought to see again, but which was branded on her memory,—the face of the woman with whom she had talked in this Cathedral only three days before, and whom the world and the law called Mrs. George Raynor.

"I'm sure you are surprised," the latter said, as Madeleine rose in speechless amazement to her feet. "Of course you were not thinking of seeing me, and I can well understand that you have no desire to see me. But I have come back to Chartres simply to see *you;* and you won't refuse to exchange a few words with me, I hope."

"Do you know who I am?" Madeleine

asked. In her immense astonishment, it seemed all that she was capable of saying.

The other nodded assent.

"Yes," she said, "I know; and that's what has brought me back. I found out who you were after we parted. It seems that my—er—husband ran across your most intimate friend at the door of the church here; and when I began to talk of you and wonder who you were, and why you refused to tell me your name, he laughed in his sneering fashion and said he could enlighten me, and perhaps I wouldn't be so interested when I knew. Well" (the speaker caught her breath), "he was mistaken there. I was more interested when I knew,—I'll tell you why presently. And when something happened which I've long expected I determined to come back and tell you about it."

Madeleine put out her hand to steady herself by the pillar on which Our Lady stands; for all this sounded almost incredible.

"I can not imagine," she said with gentle coldness, "why you should wish to see me again, or what you can possibly have to tell that would concern or interest me."

"No, I don't suppose you can imagine," the other answered. "But if it doesn't exactly concern, I think it will be tolerably certain to interest you." Then she glanced at some kneeling women near by, who had paused in their devotions to stare at the two who were

holding this unseemly conversation in audible tones at the very feet of Our Lady of the Pillar. "Can't we find some place where we may talk without being the centre of attraction?" she asked impatiently.

The question roused Madeleine to a sense of the distraction they were causing, and the irreverence in which she seemed to have a share.

"Yes," she replied hastily—so anxious to draw her companion away that she forgot for an instant that, in her opinion, there could be nothing possible for them to talk about,—"we can go elsewhere. We should certainly not be talking here."

"These women evidently think that we shouldn't," the other said scornfully; "though they seem vastly more interested in what we are saying than in their stupid prayers."

"I fancy they are only wondering at our bad manners and want of reverence," Madeleine replied, with increased coldness of tone, as she led the way toward the south porch; and there, drawing to one side under the great statue-set portal, she turned to the woman who had followed her. "We can speak here for a few minutes, if there is really any reason why we should do so," she said. "But, as I have already told you, I am altogether unable to conceive that there is such a reason."

The other regarded her keenly for a moment, before she answered.

"You don't look as serene as you did the other day," she said abruptly, in a curiously disappointed tone. "It was that which first attracted me, and made me want to speak to you,—the look you had of being at peace, of having found the secret of happiness; and it was that which, when I heard who you were, interested me, and made me want to see you again. But you either didn't have it to the degree I fancied, or you have lost it since then. *Have* you lost it?" she asked quickly. "And was our coming the cause?"

"Yes, I have lost it," Madeleine replied. "But your coming was not the cause—or, at least, only partly the cause. Of course it made me realize—remember painful things."

"I should have thought it would have been just the other way," the other said. "I should have thought you would be glad to know—for I told you pretty plainly—how miserable I was, how little I had gained of happiness or satisfaction by taking your husband from you. For of course you know that I *did* take him,—that, bad as he is, he would not have behaved toward you as he did but for me."

"Yes, I know," Madeleine answered calmly. "You were the immediate cause of his worst conduct; but the end would have been the same in any event. He was tired of me, and determined to force me to divorce him. It seemed *then* the only thing for me to do."

"Of course it was the only thing for you

to do. No woman with any self-respect could have continued to endure him. The strange thing was that I could have fancied that he would be different with me. I did fancy it, however. I wanted him—God only knows why! And, as I had always taken whatever I wanted in my life, at any cost to anybody, why, I simply took him. And I thought perhaps you'd like to know that I've been punished. I have never been so wretched in my life as since I married him; and I'm not used to endure wretchedness, so I've made up my mind to end it."

"Yes," Madeleine said, "it is quite plain that you are not used to enduring any pain from which it is possible to fly. But you know there must come some pain at last from which it will be impossible to fly; so wouldn't it be well to try to learn a little patience?"

"No, thank you!" the other answered, with a short, hard laugh. "No patience for me as long as I can escape from what is disagreeable. I marvel at myself that I've borne my life with George Raynor as long as I have. He's a mixture of brute and devil—*you* know that."

"If I do," Madeleine said, "there is nothing to be gained by talking of it."

"There's this to be gained," her companion returned bluntly: "that his conduct gives me the right—the legal right, I mean—to leave him. And I've done so. I told him last night that I will have no more to do with him; and

I am now on my way to America, to begin suit at once for divorce. I've stopped only to see you and tell you the news, because—well, because I felt as if I owed it to you to let you know that, whether divorce is right or wrong, in my case at least the taking of stolen goods hasn't prospered."

"I hardly think that it ever prospers," Madeleine answered; "and if it seems to do so—why, so much the worse for those to whom the prosperity comes. It is better to suffer as you have done."

"Is it?" (The tone was dry and cold.) "I can't agree with you there; but of course I recognize that it is natural enough for you to think so."

"I am not thinking of any harm you have done me," Madeleine said hastily. "I meant for your own sake—that you might learn just what you have acknowledged: that there is nothing but misery to be gained by snatching at that which God denies. It is a lesson which we all need," she added, with a sudden thought of her own temptation and perplexity.

"I can't imagine that you have much need of it," the other said. "You look as if patience and renunciation, and all those impossible virtues which the faith represented here" (she cast a glance of mingled dislike and unwilling respect around her) "preaches, would be easy enough to you."

"Ah, how mistaken you are,—how mistaken!"

"Am I? Well, it really doesn't matter, only in that case you might have a little sympathy for me. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*, you know."

"I am quite willing to pardon any wrong you have done me," Madeleine said gently; "for you have done yourself a far greater wrong. I was sorry for you when we met before, and I am sorry now. You don't mind my saying so?"

"No, I don't mind it at all; in fact, it's extremely good of you," the other replied. "But, however much I was a fit subject for compassion the other day, I'm not so now. I am on my way to freedom; and I'm going to cast all memory of past mistakes behind me, and begin life afresh."

It was on Madeleine's lips to ask, "Is that possible?" But some instinct of the uselessness of the question made her pause. Nevertheless, she could not refrain from gazing, with a wonder far deeper than the other had exhibited toward her, at this woman who spoke so lightly of putting such "mistakes" behind her and beginning life afresh. Had she, indeed, no sense of anything else being required of her? Was there no atonement to be made to God or to human society for sin and wrong and scandal? Had what is known as "the modern mind" absolutely lost all idea of any necessity for contrition or repentance? Was everything supposed to be ended

when "mistakes" were put behind one? Did they not remain, to face once more those who had committed them, when repentance or contrition would be too late? These questions surged through Madeleine's mind, though she recognized how vain it would be to utter them; and were reflected in her dark, marvelling eyes so plainly that the woman at whom she gazed asked sharply:

"What have I said so surprising that you should stare at me in such a manner? I shall not have the least difficulty in getting a divorce, and after that I never intend to think of George Raynor again. I don't imagine you will either; but I just thought I'd let you know how matters stand, since it may be a gratification to you to learn that if I gave you a bad time once, I've had a pretty bad one myself to make up for it. And now—well, that's all; for I suppose you wouldn't care to shake hands and wish me good luck? Yet I really did you more of a good turn than a bad one when I gave you the chance to set yourself free from such a man."

"I would rather not discuss that," Madeleine said; "but I don't object to shaking hands with you nor to wishing you good luck, though what constitutes good luck is perhaps not the same in your mind and in mine."

"There's not much doubt of that," the woman agreed. "But I know exactly what I mean when I wish *you* good luck. It's finding

somebody to make you happy, and never seeing or hearing of me or of George Raynor again. So good-bye!"

A moment later they had shaken hands; and Madeleine stood alone, watching with a sense of bewilderment the tall, fashionably dressed figure as it walked away. She almost felt inclined to wonder if she were awake or dreaming, when a high, clear voice speaking behind her effectually settled the point.

"Madeleine!" Nina cried. "Where on earth have you been, and what have you been doing all the morning? I waited for you until I could wait no longer, and then I came over here to look for you; and I've looked everywhere until by the merest chance I stepped out here. Who was that you were talking to?"

"She does not look very much like a messenger sent by Heaven," Madeleine answered, with a faint smile; "but I believe she was. At all events, she brought me the answer to a question which I came here to ask."

Nina glanced at her friend somewhat suspiciously.

"I don't like riddles," she said a trifle crossly: "and I haven't time to consider them now. Mr. Maitland and Dick Carruthers are going back to Paris this morning, and they want to say good-bye to you—at least Dick does. I believe it depends on you whether the other poor fellow says good-bye or not. Madeleine, I beg of you once more to be careful

what you do! Have you his answer ready for him?"

"Yes," Madeleine replied, without an instant's hesitation. "I have it ready—so let us go."

"But" (startled by this prompt acquiescence, Nina caught her arm and held her still) "is it the right answer? Tell me what you are going to say."

Madeleine met her anxious gaze with strangely shining eyes. Her composure seemed perfect, as that of one uplifted above doubt or fear.

"I am going to say what I know now that I was kept here to learn," she answered; "what I spoke of to you a moment ago, and you said you did not care for riddles. But this is not a riddle: it is very plain; for it is simply this: *that there is nothing to be gained by snatching at that which God denies us.*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE crisp days of autumn, melting into the soft melancholy of the "Summer of All Saints" (as the Catholic lands of Europe call the season we know as Indian Summer), had passed, and the short, dark days of winter were settling over Paris, when Mrs. Raynor and Miss Percival found themselves at last comfortably domiciled in a pleasant apartment on the left bank of the Seine, overlooking the Luxembourg Gardens.

Their return to Paris had been delayed by what could hardly be described as an illness, yet was a sudden and complete failure of physical strength on Madeleine's part, accompanied by the intense mental lassitude which often follows mental conflict and suffering. The condition had so alarmed her friend that she insisted upon carrying her off to a quiet fishing village on the coast of Brittany, where days spent in the restfulness of perfect peace, sitting on the sands, watching the tide in its mysterious ebb and flow, and the boats putting out to sea, or coming in with their freight from the great deep, had finally restored her health of mind and body.

They remained here so long that the Feast

of All Saints came; and the *Jour des Morts*, with the many tender and beautiful customs with which popular devotion has surrounded the Church's commemoration of All Souls, charmed Madeleine, both in its devotional and poetic aspect. As she lingered that day among the picturesque crowd of men and women in the churchyard, where the quiet dead lay under the shadow of the great crucifix which dominated the scene, with the soft sunshine falling over all, and the sea spread like a sheet of blue silver, her heart was stirred, as it had hardly been stirred even within the glorious walls of the Cathedral of Chartres, by faith and longing,—longing for the safe anchorage amid the storms and trials of life, which those around her had always known, and were so happy as to prize. For there was no echo of infidel France in this throng of devout Bretons, who knelt amid the graves of their kindred, and answered in a deep murmur the prayers, begging for them eternal light and rest and peace, which the *curé*, as he, too, knelt on the stone pedestal of the Calvary, recited aloud.

Then and there Madeleine registered a vow that she would delay no longer in taking whatever steps were required to admit her also into the household of Faith; and later in the day she went to the *curé*, with whom she had already made friends, and asked him what she must do. He was an old man, of the best

type of those country *curés* whose lives of recent years have been rendered so hard to them by the ruthless persecution of the godless State; and he smiled a little as he looked at her,—a very kindly smile; for, like everyone else, he had speedily yielded to the appealing charm of her gentle and lovely personality.

"You ask what you must do?" he said. "Well, the first thing, in the words of our Blessed Lord, is to become as a little child. There are those who find that difficult."

"I am not one of them," Madeleine answered very sincerely. "I am quite willing, indeed anxious, to be instructed like a child; for I suppose that is what you mean. Only tell me how I shall begin."

"Just as the child begins," he replied,—"with learning and believing the truths necessary for salvation. They are not very many, and I could easily instruct you in those. But as you went on you would want much more knowledge; for I can see that you have an eager mind, and a thirst for spiritual truth. And it is, therefore, best that you should go to a priest who speaks your own tongue. You are returning to Paris soon, are you not?"

"It has been our intention to go there in a few days," she replied. "But if you wish me to remain here, there is no reason why I should not do so."

"I do not wish you to remain, although I shall be sorry to see you leave," he said. "As

I told you a moment ago, it is better for you to find some one who can instruct you in your own language; and if you return to Paris, that can easily be arranged. Do you know the English Passionists, whose house is in the Avenue Hoche? You have been to their church?"

"No," she told him. "I know only the great churches of Paris—Notre Dame, the Madeleine, and the like. But I can easily find the church of which you speak in the Avenue Hoche."

"Yes, it is easily found," he said; "for it is much attended by English-speaking Catholics. I would advise you to go there, to make yourself known to one of the Fathers—"

"Do you know any of them?" she interrupted him to ask eagerly. "If so, would you give me a note of introduction,—that is, if it is not asking too much?"

"I have no personal acquaintance with any of them," he answered; "but I will give you a letter which you can present to the superior, and he will know best under what priest to place you."

"Oh, how kind you are,—how kind!" Madeleine said. "I could wish nothing better than that. Surely Heaven must have sent me here."

"Heaven," he said with his gentle smile, "directs all things for us, if we put no obstacle of self-will in the way. I am grateful that you were sent here, that I might have even a

little share in helping you over the threshold of the Church. It frightens outsiders a little, that threshold; but believe me when you are once safely within you will feel yourself in your father's house."

"I am already sure of that," she replied earnestly.

And so it came about that the first visit which Madeleine paid after her return to Paris was to the house of the English Passionists in the Avenue Hoche,—that house, with its church, so long and well known to English-speaking Catholics in the French capital. She presented the *curé's* letter to the superior, who looked at her keenly, asked a few direct questions, which she answered with equal directness and simplicity; and then turned her over to a priest, behind whose extremely English reserve of manner and speech she soon found the apostolic spirit of a true son of St. Paul of the Cross.

On the history of the next few weeks it is not necessary to linger. Diverse as human nature itself are the roads by which souls are led from the City of Confusion to the Church of God. But when they once reach the door of that Church, there is only one way for them to follow—the way, as the Breton *curé* said, of a little child asking for instruction in the truths of divine faith, and for the cleansing and healing grace of the Sacraments. It was without exception the happiest time Madeleine

had ever known, these days of quiet preparation, in which the luminous and logical plan of salvation was unfolded to a mind that was eager to apprehend, and a spirit thirsting for assured truth.

And then at last the priest—who had become very much interested in this convert, who received instruction like a flower opening its petals to the soft rain from heaven, and was at once so intelligent and so humble,—arranged for her to make a short retreat of two or three days in a convent (for this was before unhappy France had cast out the religious Orders) as an immediate preparation for her reception into the Church. That reception took place in the convent chapel, and there her First Communion was made. Later in the day, when the time came for her to leave this sanctuary of cloistered lives and happy souls, in which she would have asked nothing better than to remain, instead of immediately returning home, she went to the Passionist church, where she had already been so often, to return thanks to God for His great mercy toward her.

And then there occurred one of those things which we call coincidences, but for which no doubt Divine Providence has frequently another name. As she dropped to her knees on one of the low chairs in the almost empty chapel, she observed kneeling before her, side by side, the figures of a man and a lady, about each of whom there was something vaguely familiar.

In a momentary glance she received this impression, but was not interested in it; and, in her own immediate concern with the Presence in the tabernacle, forgot that she had received it, until presently the two rose, genuflected to the altar, and turned toward the door. Then, roused from her abstraction, Madeleine glanced up, to find herself looking into a face she could never forget,—the face of the lady whom she had known as Mrs. Maitland. The recognition was mutual. One paused, with a slight start; the other rose involuntarily to her feet; their hands met by a simultaneous impulse; and, the elder leading the younger as a mother might lead a child, they passed together to the vestibule, where they turned face to face, and, with another mutual impulse, kissed each other.

"I am so glad to meet you,—so glad!" she who had been Mrs. Maitland exclaimed eagerly, as she still held Madeleine's hands and gazed into her face. "And I was about to say very foolishly that it is strange I should meet you here, when it is really not strange at all; for ever since I reached Paris I have been praying that I might find you. I went to Chartres in search of you, but you were gone."

"Did you indeed go to Chartres in search of me?" Madeleine asked wonderingly. "That was good of you,—very good. I should be sorry that you had the trouble, only that it gave you an opportunity to see the Cathedral."

"Yes, I saw the Cathedral," the other answered, with a smile; "and I found many who remembered the foreign lady who loved it so well that she haunted it at all hours and times. But even the Cathedral did not repay me for not finding *you*. I came back to Paris very much disheartened; and, since no one whom I knew had any knowledge of you, I have simply gone to Our Lord and begged Him to allow me to meet you again, that I might tell you how grateful I am to you. And see how He has answered me!"

"It is for me to express gratitude," Madeleine said in a fervent tone. "But even before I do so let me tell you something you will be glad to hear. I have been received into the Church."

"Have you? I am not surprised but truly rejoiced to hear it. When were you received?"

"Only yesterday. I made my First Communion this morning."

"Ah, thank God!" Like the mother whom the girl (for she was little more) had always, missed, the elder woman stooped and kissed her again. "From my inmost heart I congratulate you!" she cried softly, and then she looked toward the man who was standing in the outer door awaiting her. "I don't know whether you remember Mr. Wynne," she said. "But you must meet him, for he is now my husband; and he, too, will be rejoiced at this news."

"Oh, yes, I remember Mr. Wynne very well!" Madeleine answered; while the tall masculine figure turned at sound of his name. "The question is whether he will remember me," she added with a smile, as she held out her hand.

"No one who ever had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Raynor could possibly forget her," Mr. Wynne replied, with the most evident sincerity, as he took the slender hand in the strong, cordial clasp of his own. "I recognized you as soon as Helen did," he said; "and I was only waiting to recall myself to your recollection. I am very happy to meet you again."

"And you will be still more happy when you hear the news she has just given me," his wife told him. "She has been received into the Church, and made her First Communion this morning."

In the strong, fine face looking at her, Madeleine read an expression of deeply moved sympathy, together with the spiritual joy which any Catholic worthy of the name feels at such news as this.

"Let me offer my warmest congratulations," Mr. Wynne said; "not only on the great grace which has been given to you, but on the manner in which you have responded to it."

"Do you know to whom I believe I owe the grace?" Madeleine asked. She turned her dark, gentle gaze from one face to the other. "It is to Mrs. Maitland,—I beg pardon! I

should say Mrs. Wynne. And that reminds me that my congratulations have not yet been offered to both of you. Believe me your news has made this happy day even happier to me."

"Then come and spend the remainder of it with us," Mrs. Wynne suggested eagerly. "We will go now and get a cup of tea, over which we will open our hearts to each other; then later we will dine together quietly, and then—"

"You are very kind," Madeleine interposed; "but I have a friend with whom I live, who is waiting for me, and whom I can not disappoint."

"But can't you see your friend, and then come to us?" Mrs. Wynne insisted. "Our meeting has been so providential that I can not let you escape."

"I have not the least desire to escape," Madeleine assured her. "I shall be glad to see as much of you as you will allow me to see as long as you are in Paris. But now I must go home for the reason I have given; and, once there, I think I would rather not go out again,—not even to dine with you. Perhaps you will understand this."

"Yes, I understand. I should be very dull if I did not. But to-morrow,—you will come to me to-morrow, will you not?"

"With the greatest pleasure. But for to-day an idea has just occurred to me. You spoke a moment ago of tea, and I know that Nina—that is, my friend Miss Percival—is at this

moment waiting to give me some. Will you not come and share it with me,—you and Mr. Wynne?"

"I should like to do so very much, if you are sure we shall not incommode your friend."

"Oh, no, no! At this hour we are always ready to receive our friends, who often drop in informally. But Nina will not be likely to have any one with her this afternoon. She knows that I would not wish it. The only guest for whom I should care to-day would be the one—I mean the two—whom Heaven has sent me."

"You mean exactly what you have said—the *one*," Mr. Wynne here interposed. "And if you had not said it, I could hardly be so obtuse as not to know that you felt it. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you when you come to us to-morrow, and I hope on many other occasions, but to-day belongs exclusively to Mrs. Wynne. So let me put you both in the cab which is waiting, and I will have the agreeable exercise of a stroll down the Champs-Elysées."

Madeleine demurred a little at this, but Mrs. Wynne drew her toward the indicated vehicle.

"Come!" she said. "He is quite right. A wise man knows that there are occasions when it is well for him to efface himself—and this, 'though I say it who shouldn't,' is a very wise man. Besides, exercise is good for his

health. Now give the cabman your address."

Madeleine gave the address; and, as in a dream, found herself alone with the woman whom of all in the world she had most desired to know, but the thought of whom she had put away into the realm of unattainable things when she recognized the barrier dividing her from that woman's son. Yet now she suddenly realized that no knowledge which they could have had of each other, if no such barrier existed, and she had in the natural course of things become John Maitland's wife, would have been comparable to that which they now possessed. The sacrifice which divided had at the same time united them in the deepest sense. Each had learned by that crucial test a knowledge of the other which years of ordinary intercourse might not have given; for it remains true that the only friendship worth calling friendship is that in which soul is revealed to soul, when, like bells in unison, the stroke of life is answered by the same clear note from each.

Probably this thought was in the minds of both of those who had been so unexpectedly brought together; for they were silent for several minutes after they drove away from the door of the Passionist church. Then Mrs. Wynne turned and laid her hand on the hands which were lightly clasped together in Madeleine's lap.

"My dear," she said, "I simply can not tell you how happy it makes me to have

found you, to be with you, and to know what you have told me about yourself."

Madeleine looked up, with all her heart in the eyes which were at once radiant and pathetic.

"You are more than good to feel so; for, if you do not remember, *I* can not forget how much sorrow and anxiety you owe to me."

"To you? Never!" the other replied quickly. "All that I owe to you is a debt of gratitude which I have no possible means of paying. Think how wretched I should be, and where my poor son would be, if you had been like so many women brought up as you were,—thinking only of the world and the world's laws, clamoring for happiness, demanding the gratification of your own desires as a right, and ignoring utterly all rights and claims which opposed those desires! Can I ever forget the amazing result of that visit to you, which I undertook in a spirit close to despair? I felt that I *must* appeal to you, *must* warn you; but I had no hope of your heeding either appeal or warning. And then, at a word, a hint, you rose to the full height of the occasion; you grasped the idea of sacrifice, which is hardest of all for a Protestant to grasp; you took the situation in your own hand; you went away; and it was not your fault that my headstrong son followed you."

"No, it was not my fault," Madeleine said. "But it must have made you very unhappy; for necessarily you doubted, feared—"

"Not you!" Mrs. Wynne declared. "I was as sure of you as of myself. I did not believe that the strength which had nerved you once would fail you under a fresh trial."

"Ah, but it almost did!" Madeleine cried. "You don't know how near I was to yielding before I sent him away."

The other shook her head.

"You may think so," she said; "but I am certain that the temptation to yield was only on the surface,—that in its depths your soul stood firm; the proof of which is that you did send him away; and that he told me, when at last pride and anger yielded, and he once more spoke freely to me, that he found you as immovable as a rock. 'But that is not strange,' he added; 'for she is a Catholic in belief, and will no doubt soon enter the Church.' That was why I said I was not surprised when you told me you had entered it."

"There was another reason, if you had known it, why you should not have been surprised," Madeleine said; "and that was that I owed the impulse which has carried me into the Church to your visit and your words. Do you remember how you spoke of the 'coin of sacrifice'?"

"How could I forget it, when in the letter you left you thanked me 'for teaching you that word,' and said that no one should pay such coin for you; but that you gladly paid it for John, for me, and for yourself, that 'perhaps

you might purchase some things of the value of which you were then only dimly aware, but which you felt to be beyond all price'? Don't be surprised that I can quote your words so exactly; for that letter has been graven on my heart. It was a revelation of yourself, which made me weep with regret to think of the barrier that divided us. But what fools we are, what utter fools, not to trust God! You see He had something better in store for you than the happiness I regretted."

"To-day I feel that," Madeleine said. "To-day I have seemed to realize the things beyond all price of which I had a faint vision when I wrote to you. But I am told that I must not expect this exaltation of feeling to last, and that often God sends graces to prepare us for greater trials."

"You have had your trials," Mrs. Wynne said almost sharply. "Of course as long as we are in the world we must expect to be tried more or less; but I believe that there is a time of tranquillity and happiness, such as you have never known, before you now."

Madeleine glanced at her wistfully.

"It seems as if it were a beginning of it, to have met you in this wonderful way," she said, "and to have the prospect of being with you for a time at least. But here we are!"—as the cab suddenly stopped. "And there is Nina's face at the window of our apartment, looking out for me."

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE is certainly a charming woman," Nina observed meditatively, after Mrs. Wynne had taken her departure. "I don't wonder that you fell in love with her. You suit each other so exactly—you and she—that it really seems a great pity that you couldn't have seen your way to marrying her son."

"My dear Nina," Madeleine remonstrated, "how often must I tell you that it wasn't a question of seeing my way, but of an insurmountable obstacle to marrying him?"

"Oh, yes! I know your point of view," Nina returned a little irritably; "and I don't propose arguing about it. I've exhausted myself in argument already; and if it was useless in the past, it would be worse than useless now, since you have closed the door of hope with your own hand."

"I suppose that is a poetical way of stating the fact that I have entered the Catholic Church," Madeleine said, smiling. "I should describe it as the opening rather than the closing of a door. But you are quite right about its ending all question of my marrying John Maitland or any one else, since a woman can not have two living husbands."

Nina glanced at her curiously.

"You say that very coolly," she remarked; "yet it has not been very long since I saw you almost ready to faint with horror at the suggestion that you were still bound to George Raynor."

"Quite true," was the calm reply; "but I have grown stronger since then. I have faced the truth, and learned that when one faces things they are not so hard to bear. It does no good to close one's eyes to what *is*, however one might wish it otherwise, you know."

Nina made an inarticulate sound which seemed to imply dissent from this view, but she did not speak; and so for an interval silence fell in the pleasant, fire-lighted room.

Lying back in a low chair before the grate heaped with coal, over the glowing red depths of which a flickering veil of transparent flame was playing, Madeleine was conscious of an altogether delightful sense of restfulness. After long struggle, ending in the intense emotions of the last few days, her soul seemed to sink down, as if glad to share in the body's repose; and both lay quiescent, passive, wrapped in a state of indescribable *bien-etre*. Without any effort her mind dwelt on the experiences through which she had just passed, and found them perfect. There had been nothing to mar the happy days in the convent, nothing to distract the soul from the wonderful realization of the sacraments, and the last touch of

happiness had been given in the unexpected meeting with Mrs. Wynne. Then, leaving higher things, the tired mind dwelt with intense pleasure on the memory of that lady's fascinating personality. Imagination still saw her in the empty chair where she had sat, investing even the ordinary act of drinking a cup of tea with her extraordinary grace and charm. She had kissed Madeleine on parting as her own mother might have done, and bade her remember that they were to be together as much as possible as long as she remained in Paris. Surely, Madeleine told herself, she might with a sense of security enjoy in anticipation the happy and peaceful days which lay before her, as a reward—very humbly she thought of it as such—for following the path of sacrifice along which God had beckoned her.

How long she had been wrapped in this dreamful ease she did not know—perhaps only a few minutes, perhaps longer; for the dusk was deepening outside the windows, through which the tall trees in the gardens of the Luxembourg could be seen tossing their bare boughs against a gray sky,—when Nina presently spoke abruptly:

"If only," she said, "George Raynor would die!"

"Nina!" Madeleine sat up startled, although she was sufficiently familiar with the Protestant habit of wishing that Providence would

"take" those who are a source of trouble to others, or who suffer from painful and incurable maladies. In the last case indeed, wishing has advanced to the point of advocating that the neglected duty of Providence should be performed by self-appointed agents.

"Well" (Nina was in arms at once), "why shouldn't I express what you must certainly feel?"

"I don't—I beg you to believe that I don't—feel anything of the kind!" Madeleine protested earnestly.

"Then the more fool you!" her friend snapped impolitely. "I don't believe in pious hypocrisies, and therefore I have no hesitation in saying that it would be a very good thing for everybody concerned, and especially for you, if George Raynor would die."

"But how do you know that it would be a good thing?" Madeleine asked. "I suppose you mean that it would allow me to marry John Maitland, and 'be happy ever after,' like the heroine of an old-fashioned romance. But evidently that is not God's view of what is best for me, or it would occur."

"Madeleine, I have no patience with that mystical kind of talk. God means people to be happy,—you know that He does."

"I know nothing of the kind," Madeleine answered. "There is no warrant for such an assertion. On the contrary, God has distinctly told us that we must look beyond this life

for happiness; that it is futile to seek it here, and only those who don't seek ever find it."

"I detest such ideas!" Nina declared. "If I thought they were true, I shouldn't believe in the goodness of God."

Madeleine looked at her pityingly.

"But if they are true, how can refusing to believe in the goodness of God change or help matters?" she inquired. "Well, never mind! I know these discussions are useless. Only tell me this: when you wish that George Raynor would die to allow me to be happy, what consideration are you giving *him?*"

Nina stared.

"What consideration should I give him?" she inquired in turn. "He deserves none."

"It is not a question of what he deserves, but what he stands in need of," Madeleine said. "Think what an awful thing death would be to one who lives as he does, unless he repented of his sins before it came!"

Nina threw back her head with a burst of laughter.

"Fancy George Raynor repenting of his sins!" she cried. "I can't imagine any juxtaposition of ideas more incongruous. I have no idea that he has ever in his life given a thought to the subject of sin or of repentance."

"I have no reason to believe that he ever has," Madeleine said; "and that is just what I mean. Don't you see how dreadful death would be to such a man? And yet you wish

him hastened out of the world in order that life might be easier for me! O Nina, never utter such a wish again!"

"I consider it an eminently sensible wish," Nina persisted stoutly; "though I won't express it if you object to hearing it. You see, I haven't your faith in conditions hereafter. My beliefs are pretty hazy, like those of most of my generation; and this life is all that I care to reckon with. So it seems to me a great pity that you shouldn't have the good of yours."

"But I hope to have the good of it in the best way—the only way that has an eternal value," Madeleine replied quickly. "I wish I could make you understand how life and all its meaning has changed for me, but I am afraid that is impossible."

"It is not impossible for me to understand that the state of religious exaltation in which you have been, has carried you away from the earth into the clouds," Nina said. "I feared as much. And what is to be the end?"

"Nothing dreadful, I hope," Madeleine assured her. "You are hard to please. You want me to be happy, and when I tell you that I *am* happy you shake your head gloomily over it."

"Because we are talking of different things," Nina cried. "What you mean by happiness is an unhealthy mysticism, but that is not what *I* mean. As you said a moment ago, however, there is no good in discussing a

subject on which we differ so widely. I am glad you have met this lovely Mrs. Wynne, who has such an agreeably worldly air that I hope she may do you good."

At this Madeleine laughed.

"I am quite sure that Mrs. Wynne's brand of worldliness would do any one good," she said. "And I was delighted that you accepted her invitation to lunch with her to-morrow."

"I thought it nice of her to ask me, since naturally it is only for you that she cared," Nina observed. "Shall I go, or shall I let you take my excuses?"

"Oh, you must go without doubt!" Madeleine answered eagerly. "I want you to know her, and I could see that she was interested in you. It is a great happiness to have met her, and a great happiness also to be here again so peacefully with you, Ninita. I am more grateful than I can say for both."

. . . . . .

Mrs. Wynne, looking more charming than ever, in a toilette that delighted Nina's eye, which was as keen for fashion as for art, received her guests with an almost affectionate cordiality when they arrived the next day at the hotel near the Rue de la Paix, where her husband and herself were staying, and led the way at once to the pretty dining-room on the ground floor, opening on what was in summer an orange-set courtyard, where a

beautifully appointed table was reserved for them.

"I am sorry," she said, as they sat down, "that I must convey my husband's regrets that he can not have the pleasure of being with us. But the business which has brought him to Paris is of so exacting a nature that, after we have breakfasted together, I rarely see him again until late in the afternoon. It is no violation of confidence to say that he is engaged in the promotion of large financial schemes and investments, and there are no people so insatiable of details as the financiers who are concerned in such schemes). Therefore, in order that he may enjoy your society, we must arrange to dine together some evening soon, and meanwhile I am not sorry to have you all to myself to-day."

Involuntarily she looked at Madeleine as she spoke, and the soft dark eyes which met her own said more eloquently than words that the last sentiment was fully shared by their possessor.

"It must be very interesting as well as profitable to be engaged in large financial schemes, especially when they bring you to Paris," Nina remarked. "Do you always accompany Mr. Wynne?"

Mrs. Wynne smiled slightly, as her glance again sought Madeleine's.

"This is the first time I have accompanied him," she said; "for we were married only

just before we sailed. He came over last summer, but I was not—not ready to accompany him then, and he kindly consented to give me another chance."

Nina lifted her eyebrows.

"Excuse me," she said, "but what an extraordinary way to speak of it! You surely mean that you kindly consented to give *him* another chance."

"No," Mrs. Wynne answered. "I mean exactly what I have said. The decision had passed out of my hands, and it was he who gave *me* the chance. You see" (once more her eyes sought Madeleine), "the matter stood this way: a sacrifice had seemed demanded of me in order to obtain a great favor from Heaven—yes, I know," she broke off, as Nina made an irrepressible movement, "that sounds very strange to you, but it is a common thing with Catholics to offer such sacrifices when they desire anything very much—"

"You mean that they believe they can *buy* it?" Nina was unable to refrain from exclaiming.

"If you put it that way, why not?" Mrs. Wynne asked calmly. "It is not a new idea. We are told—I speak reverently—that we are 'bought with a price'; and if the great Purchase could be made, why not lesser ones? It all involves the doctrine of substitution—of one suffering for another,—of which perhaps you know something."

"I—have heard of it," Nina murmured, gazing with an amazement which was close upon stupefaction at this woman, who, with her air of what might be called exquisite worldliness—that is, of the highest social knowledge and breeding—in her dress, which bore the latest touch of fashion, talked like a cloistered nun of mystical beliefs and practices which seemed as far removed from real life as fairy-tales.

Meanwhile, however, Mrs. Wynne went on with the same calmness:

"But the sacrifice I wished to make was taken out of my hands: another insisted on paying it, and leaving me free to fulfil a promise given long before. And perhaps I had tried the patience of a very patient man too far. At least he declared that if I intended to marry him, it must be 'now or never'; and I was almost ready to let it be 'now' when something occurred,—something which made it impossible for me to feel that I was free to seek my own happiness. So I told him it must be 'never,' and sent him away very sad and angry. Well" (the speaker drew a short, quick breath), "I need not dwell on a very wretched time of loneliness and suspense. Presently the suspense ended, and I learned—what I had indeed hardly doubted—that she who had undertaken to pay the coin of sacrifice was firm in her determination to do so. When, therefore, Mr. Wynne was good enough, as I have already

said, to give me another chance, I felt that I should be lacking in faith, both human and divine, if I did not take it. So, *me voila*" (she spread out her hands), "a very happy and at the same time humbled woman, who has learned that great sacrifices are not for her!"

"I think I understand," said Nina, looking from the speaker to Madeleine, whose eyes were now cast down on her plate; "but it is a drama where the whole point seems to lie inward rather than outward."

"Don't you think that that is always the case in any drama worthy of interest?" Mrs. Wynne asked, smiling at her. "Which is another way of saying that what concerns the soul is alone of supreme importance."

Nina glanced, with a mocking expression, around the room, filled just now with groups of people whose appearance seemed to indicate anything rather than acquiescence in the last statement.

"I wonder how many of these," she observed, with a slight nod, "consider that what concerns the soul is alone of supreme importance?"

"Not many perhaps," Mrs. Wynne answered; "and yet it is difficult to tell. There may be more than you are inclined to think. Take ourselves, for example. We have not very much the look of ascetics" (she glanced over their luxuriously served table), "yet you see that we believe it."

"That is true, of course, so far as you and

Madeleine are concerned," Nina said hastily; "but it isn't true of me. I can't let you think that I am so transcendental as to believe anything of the kind, for I really don't."

"And I am quite sure that you do, if you took time to sift your beliefs," Mrs. Wynne told her. "In point of fact, when we think at all, there isn't anything else that we can believe, unless we take refuge in blank negation."

"Oh, merely as an academic statement, perhaps!" conceded Nina, who was not averse to proving her intelligence. "And I will say that you Catholics occupy the only logical position in the matter," she added; "though I disapprove of carrying such ideas too far."

Then Madeleine lifted her eyes, with a look of amusement in them.

"Nina means that for me," she said. "She disapproves—"

Suddenly her voice failed, as if a strong hand had clutched her throat; and into her eyes there came such an expression of dismay, amounting to terror, as she gazed beyond Nina into the room, with its vista of glittering tables and well-dressed people, that the latter turned quickly in her chair to see what had caused the change.

She had not far to look to discover the cause. At a table not more than a few feet distant from them three men were taking their places; and one of these—ah, there was

no reason to wonder at the expression in Madeleine's eyes when her glance fell on that well-remembered personality! How unmistakable was the figure, inclining more and more to stoutness as the years went on; and the face once strikingly handsome, but now marred by marks of an evil temper, and coarsened by unrestrained indulgence in the appetites of the body! It was, in the last respect, a face such as is frequently seen on men whom worldly prosperity has rendered able to purchase whatever the flesh desires or the devil suggests, and to whom abstinence and self-control have not been taught even as maxims of worldly wisdom; but the deepening traces of a temper violent almost to the point of insanity differentiated this face from the purely animal type, and, as Nina knew well, sometimes gave it an absolutely diabolical aspect.

But this aspect was not perceptible just now. George Raynor—for there was no doubt that it was he—was apparently in one of his most amiable moods. He was talking and laughing with the men who accompanied him; and their conversation appeared to be of so interesting a nature (its subject was indicated by the word "motor" which repeatedly caught the attention of those near by) that it was several minutes before he observed the group of ladies whose table was on a line with that at which he and his companions sat down.

Meanwhile Nina, turning back and seeing

Madeleine's paling face, half rose from her chair.

"You had better change seats with me," she said abruptly.

But Madeleine, with a motion of her hand, bade her be still.

"I shall not move," she replied in a low voice. "Take no notice of—anything."

"What is it?" Mrs. Wynne asked involuntarily.

Then she, too, glanced at the newcomers, and saw the man who was now staring at them with a look which sufficiently enlightened her. She had an instant intuition of who he was, and with her eyes consulted Nina, who shook her head slightly, to signify that there was nothing to be done. But after a swift glance at Madeleine, Mrs. Wynne was of another opinion. She quietly laid down her napkin.

"I think we need not linger here longer," she said. "I will order coffee to be served in my apartment. Come, dear!"

She drew Madeleine's hand within her arm as they rose; and the support, light as it was, proved so steadying that the latter walked out of the room without a sign of faltering, although they were forced to pass so close to the other table that her skirts brushed the chair on which George Raynor sat.

CHAPTER XIII.

"You are both more than kind," Madeleine said gratefully to her two friends, as they drank their coffee a little later, in the safe seclusion of Mrs. Wynne's apartment. "But there was really no need to have inconvenienced yourselves on my account. For a moment I was startled, and no doubt showed it; but at the same time I had a sense of interior strength, which prevented my being unnerved—as I was" (she glanced at Nina) "on another occasion. Besides, unless I were to shut myself up, I could not avoid the possibility of these encounters; and it is well that I should learn how to meet them, without permitting them to affect me too much—outwardly, at least."

"All of which is quite true," Mrs. Wynne replied. "But, however brave you may be, the fact remains that such encounters do affect you painfully; and there was, therefore, no objection to our simply moving from a public to a private room. If I could have foreseen (but one never can foresee such occurrences) I should have ordered luncheon served here in the first place."

"It is most provoking that the creature should have appeared just at this time!" Nina

remarked, with a frown of annoyance. "Madeleine goes out so seldom that it is hard that she could not have enjoyed her visit to you in peace."

Madeleine looked at Mrs. Wynne with a faint smile.

"Nina is so good that she would like to shield me from everything unpleasant," she said. "I can't make her believe that that would be very weakening to my moral stamina."

"It is an inclination which we all share," Mrs. Wynne told her. "When we love people we would like to make their lives easy and prosperous and happy, to shield them from all things hard and painful,—which means from all that would test and try their moral strength. But fortunately we have only a limited power to accomplish this. God knows better than we do what is best for souls and characters, which, to form and perfect them, must often be tried 'as by fire.'"

"I know the point of view," Nina said a little impatiently; "and, frankly, I don't like it. Moreover, I don't think it's true. My experience is that, under trials, people grow hard and bitter and sour, that lives are cramped and thwarted, and never attain their true development; whereas prosperity has the effect on character which sunshine has on flowers."

"I fancy that we must all have observed quite other effects which it sometimes has,"

Mrs. Wynne remarked, smiling. "But, granting what you say as true, when storms come—for come they must, in the moral as in the physical world,—flowers which have known only sunshine are scarcely fitted to endure or withstand them; while as for the fact that people frequently grow hard and bitter under adversity, one can only say that it is altogether their own fault. No trial is ever sent to us without the grace to enable us to bear it with profit to our own souls, if—ah, a great *if*, this!—we are prepared to submit our will to the will of God."

"Counsels of perfection!" scoffed Nina, who had learned a few Catholic phrases from her association with Madeleine. "They are too hard for 'human nature's daily food.'"

Mrs. Wynne shook her head, as she put down her coffee-cup and touched a bell.

"Not counsels of perfection," she said. "The primary essential, and foundation of the most ordinary Christian life, is conformity to the divine will; and with this, hardness and bitterness can not exist. 'Blessed are the hearts that bend, for they shall never break,' you know. But I am really not going to preach to you any more; you must forgive me for having done so already—"

"But I don't feel that you have preached at all," Nina assured her quickly. "It is I who have provoked the discussion each time. These ideas of yours and Madeleine's interest

me, but I also instinctively revolt against them; they are so opposed to all my ideas of life, and its meaning and purpose."

"I am quite sure of that," Mrs. Wynne answered, with a very kindly look; "but perhaps after a while you will see things differently. Now I hope that neither of you objects to a drive? I have ordered a carriage, so that we may take a turn in the Bois while the sun shines, and then go to one of the fashionable tea-rooms for a cup of tea and a glimpse of the *beau-monde*."

No one objecting, this programme was carried out. In a short time the carriage was announced, and the three ladies were soon driving up the Champs Elysées, in the level sunshine of the short winter afternoon, amid the stream of glittering equipages rolling toward the Arc de Triomphe and the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne beyond. By the time they reached the beautiful pleasure ground—beautiful even in its leafless garb—Madeleine had thrown off the depressing effect of her meeting with the man whose life she had once so closely shared, and, like her companions, responded to the influence of the brilliant and animated scene of which they formed a part. Then came a pleasant hour in one of the newly opened tea-rooms, where fashionable Paris assembles in the late afternoon to drink a cup of tea, to exhibit its elegant toilettes, and discuss the last items of social gossip. And

a little later, when Mrs. Wynne set the two friends down at their own door, in the purple twilight through which the myriad lights of the great city were beginning to gleam, it was with the definite engagement to meet Madeleine again the next day, that they might visit some of the churches which neither of them had yet seen.

As she drove back alone to her hotel, however, a shade of something like anxiety settled upon Mrs. Wynne, and was perceived by the keen glance of her husband as soon as she entered the room where he was awaiting her.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Did anything go amiss with your plans?"

"Not with my plans," she answered, as she sat down and began to draw off her gloves. "But something disagreeable happened, and I must guard against its recurrence. Will you be good enough to find out if a man named Raynor—American, of course—is staying at this hotel? If he is, we must go to another."

Mr. Wynne raised his brows slightly.

"I suppose," he said, "that the man in question is the divorced husband of Mrs. Raynor. But why should his presence here concern us?"

"I'm afraid you are a little obtuse sometimes," Mrs. Wynne replied, with a sigh. "Don't you see that I can't ask Mrs. Raynor to come to visit me at a hotel where she might encounter at any time the man whom

of all in the world she most wishes to avoid?"

"Has she already encountered him?"

"Yes; that is the disagreeable happening of which I spoke a moment ago. He came into the dining-room with a party of men while we were at luncheon to-day. As ill-luck would have it, they were placed at a table very near us; and when she looked up and saw him, I thought for a moment that she would faint—only, modern women don't faint from emotion. Fortunately, we had nearly finished our luncheon; so I carried her away at once, and ordered coffee served up here."

"That was really too bad!" said Mr. Wynne, whose sympathy was now roused to the point of action. "I'll go at once and inquire if the fellow is staying in this house; and if so, we will leave it to-morrow."

He left the room, but was not gone very long; and when he returned a reassuring smile answered his wife's glance before he spoke.

"The man is not staying here," he said. "His presence in the dining-room to-day was purely accidental. He, with several others, merely came in to lunch with an Englishman who was staying in the hotel, but has now left it. The entire party, it appears, were motor-lunatics, on their way to the automobile races in the south of France."

Mrs. Wynne drew a deep breath of relief.

"I am so glad to know that there is no

danger of our encountering him again," she said. "It was pitiable to see how painfully his presence affected that poor child, although she was very brave in controlling herself. I would not for anything subject her to the same ordeal again."

"There is no reason to fear it at present," Mr. Wynne said; "but no one can guard against accidents like that of to-day. When the man returns to Paris, as he probably will return when the races are over, Mrs. Raynor may meet him again; but neither you nor any one else can foresee or prevent an encounter of the kind."

"Very true," Mrs. Wynne agreed. "But there is no admonition I like better than that which tells us that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. He may not return to Paris. He may go directly home, or—motor-racing is dreadfully dangerous—something may happen to him."

"Helen, I'm astonished at you!"

"I don't wish—Good Heavens, you can't imagine that I would *wish* anything of the sort!" Mrs. Wynne protested. "But when the idea presents itself, it's impossible not to think how it would smooth things for the woman whose life he has made so miserable, and—for John."

Mr. Wynne turned on her a glance at once tender and quizzical.

"Aye, John!" he said. "There's the crux

of the matter for you. But do you really think that John has behaved so well that he deserves to have things smoothed for him?"

"I am quite sure that he has behaved so badly that he does not deserve anything at all," John's mother unhesitatingly replied. "But you are mistaken in believing that I am thinking chiefly of him. On the contrary, I am thinking most of Madeleine; and you'll admit that she deserves any and all things good which Providence might allow."

"I admit that willingly enough; but, if you'll forgive me, I must add that in my opinion she also deserves something better than John Maitland."

"Richard, that is *very* unkind of you! The poor boy was beside himself; he was hardly responsible."

"Don't deceive yourself, Helen. He was perfectly responsible. I talked to him before he went away, and I never saw in any one a more cool and deliberate determination to do a forbidden thing in defiance of all consequences."

Mrs. Wynne looked distressed.

"I know," she said. "But when he came back he was different."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that it would be long before John Maitland could be reinstated in his good opinion,—if, indeed, such reinstatement ever took place.

"He was different only because he had not

succeeded in bending Mrs. Raynor's will to his," he said. "I don't want to pain you, Helen; but the boy has been like a son to me, and I speak of him as I would of a son. It is by no act or merit of his own that he is not to-day cut off and excommunicated from the Church. And it is hardly likely, therefore, that even an unworthy man would be removed from the world to allow him to have what he wants.'

Mrs. Wynne regarded her husband with a smile, which was for the uncompromising manner in which he stripped a subject of verbiage, and showed the clear, hard core of meaning or fact below. She was familiar with this method—it had been applied to herself on more than one occasion,—and she made no more than a slight protest now.

"I never dreamed of desiring that the man should be removed from the world for such a purpose," she said. "I hope I know better than that. And fatalities don't happen to people like him. They pass through all dangers unscathed, and remain in the world to the utmost limit of old age, in order to exercise the patience of everyone connected with them. Now I will get ready for dinner; and then we are going to the Francais, are we not?"

The next few days were most agreeably spent by the two women, who were so entirely congenial to each other, in sight-seeing excur-

sions, chiefly to the churches and religious institutions which form a world apart in Paris,—that seat and centre of the fiercest warfare between the forces of good and evil in the modern world. From the great cathedral of the Ile de la Cité, and the jewel-like beauty of the Sainte Chapelle, from the ancient shrine of St. Genevieve on the left bank of the Seine, to the vast new basilica of the Sacred Heart on the height of Montmartre, they wandered in pleasant companionship, and with a delightful sense of unhurried leisure; pausing when and where they would, and generally ending the day with Benediction at Notre Dame des Victoires, which is one of the marvellous sights of Paris,—the most marvellous triumph of the supernatural over the material world in the very heart of the latter.

For wonder never ceases to strike the mind afresh when, turning from the streets and boulevards, where this world displays itself in most seductive forms to the men and women who throng them, one enters that sanctuary of prayers, where so many marvels of faith, both visible and invisible, have taken place. "At whatever hour one goes there," says Huysmans, in the wonderful book which he has called "En Route," "people are praying there, prostrate in absolute silence. It is full as soon as it is open, and full at its closing. There is a constant coming and going of pilgrims; and it seems that each one, by the

prayers that he brings, adds fuel to the immense brasier of Faith whose flames break out again under the smoky arches like the thousands of tapers which constantly burn, and are renewed from morning till evening before Our Lady."

Indeed, who that has seen can ever forget that dazzling mass of radiance,—the altar with its countless votive lights, amid which stands the crowned figure of Our Lady of Victories, holding her Divine Son in her arms? Or who, forming one of the immense congregation always present, has not been thrilled by the religious enthusiasm animating the mass as one soul? This is felt in the deep-toned responses to the Rosary and Litany, but especially at Benediction when the congregation joins the choir in singing the *Tantum Ergo*. "When the organ sounded the first chords of this noble plain-chant melody, the choir," as Huysmans again says, "had only to cross their arms and hold their tongues. As tapers which are lighted by threads of fulminate attached one to the other, the faithful caught fire, and, accompanied by the organ, struck up for themselves the humble and glorious strain. They were then kneeling on the chairs, prostrate on the pavement; and when, after the exchange of antiphons and responses, after the *Oremus*, the priest ascended to the altar, his shoulders and hands enfolded in the white silk scarf, to take the monstrance, then, at the shrill and hurried

sound of the bells, a wind passed which at once bent every head like the mowing of grass. In these groups of souls on fire there was a fulness of devotion, a complete and absolute silence, till the bells again rang out, and invited human life, which had been interrupted, to wrap itself in a great Sign of the Cross and resume its course."

There are those who perhaps may say that this is a scene which may be witnessed in any Catholic church at Benediction; and in a certain degree that is true, but only in a degree; for there are few places on this earth where faith is so quickened by the contagion of "souls on fire," where miracles of grace become, as it were, so visible to the senses, as in Notre Dame des Victoires.

It was so at least that Madeleine found it. Never since the unforgotten day when, alone in the distant church of the New World, she felt for the first time the reality of the things of the spirit, had the vision which came to her then been so renewed as in this shrine and home of wonders. Here again she had the intense consciousness of that Something behind the veil which gives life and meaning to man's worship. And again as before, in the light of that vision all things became easy. "The soul was ready to lay down its arms, to take God's way, to ask only that His will might be accomplished in and by it." And, while it is true enough that this is an illumination

which does not last, after the light has faded the effect remains: the soul has been nerved for sacrifice,—for following those hard and often blood-stained paths which lead to the difficult heights of spiritual perfection.

A certain comprehension of this came to Madeleine more than once when she knelt in the thronged church before the blazing altar; but it was particularly clear one evening—so clear that she had not a doubt of some trial awaiting her—when she finally rose and followed Mrs. Wynne to the outside world, the brilliancy of which in this part of Paris smote upon the senses as a visible challenge from all that was material and alluring.

And the premonition—if premonition it should be called—was soon verified. She was dining with the Wynnes that evening; and when Mr. Wynne, who had not been with them, met his wife, he at once drew her aside.

"Helen," he said, "the afternoon journals contain an account of a dreadful accident in that automobile race in the south. Two Frenchmen have been killed, and an American fatally injured. The American is George Raynor. Had you not better tell Mrs. Raynor?"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Madeleine heard the news of the reported fatal accident to the man whom she had again learned to regard as her husband, she did not speak for a moment or two. Her large dark eyes expanded in something like wonder as she gazed at Mrs. Wynne—gazed as if she were looking at more than the kind, anxious face before her,—and it was not until the latter had repeated her statement twice that she said:

"You will think it strange that I am not surprised; but before I left the church I felt sure that something had happened, or was about to happen, which would affect me deeply. I did not think of—*him*, though I might have done so. I see now that nothing happening to any one else could affect me so much."

"Of course not," Mrs. Wynne agreed; "since, as a Catholic, you are obliged to feel yourself still bound to him. But this" (it was impossible to keep a certain note of restrained gratification out of her voice) "will set you free."

"I think not," Madeleine replied quietly. "It does not seem to me that *that* was what was meant. I had a distinct sense of coming

trial, and to be set free would be no trial. I could not mourn for the man who forced me to divorce him, though God knows I should be sorry if he were hurried out of life in this awful manner."

"Is it in the least degree likely that he would be any better prepared for death, if it came in any other manner?" Mrs. Wynne could not resist asking.

"Perhaps not," Madeleine admitted; "and yet one would desire that he should have the chance."

"I suppose one must desire that," Mrs. Wynne answered, a trifle reluctantly. "Yet what is the good of a chance that would not be used? So far as we can see, it would only make matters worse in the end for the soul concerned." She paused a moment. "The report says very positively that Mr. Raynor is fatally injured," she added.

"But reports of the kind are often exaggerated," Madeleine said. "I should like to know the truth, yet I hesitate to telegraph in my own name. Do you think that Mr. Wynne would be kind enough to make some inquiries for me?"

"I am sure that he will be glad to do so," Mrs. Wynne answered promptly. "Come and talk to him about it."

Mr. Wynne was not only glad to do anything to assist Mrs. Raynor, but he was one of the men (most comfortable and satisfactory they

are) who always know exactly how to obtain desired results. His inquiries were made through a channel which insured immediate reply; and before Madeleine left her friends that night, she learned the details of the accident which had stopped the mad race of automobiles southward through France. One of the great cars, equipped only for speed, had, in making a sharp curve, dashed down a steep declivity, and turned over, prisoning beneath it the owner, a young French baron, his chauffeur, and Raynor, who was in the car with them. The first two were killed instantly; but Raynor was drawn forth living, though terribly crushed and unconscious. He was still living when the answer to Mr. Wynne's inquiry was sent; but no assurance could be given of how long he was likely to survive, and not the least hope of any improvement in his condition was held out.

"You see," Mrs. Wynne said to Madeleine, "it is quite clear that his injuries are fatal, and that it is only a question of a short time until the end comes."

"Yes," Madeleine assented, "it is quite clear that that is the opinion of those about him; but even doctors often find themselves mistaken."

"But, my dear," Mrs. Wynne was constrained to argue, "how can you think that you know better than those who are there with him?"

"I don't think anything of the kind," Mad-

eleine replied. "I am only stating a fact—that doctors are sometimes mistaken; and I have a feeling that this is one of the cases in which they will prove so."

Against a feeling which was so manifestly without reasonable basis, Mrs. Wynne felt that it was useless to argue; and, after all, as she reminded herself, Madeleine's opinion of the condition of a man hundreds of miles away was not of the least importance. No doubt the doctors on the spot were right; and it was likely that the next day would bring the news that George Raynor's misspent life was ended, and the woman he had married was free in fact as well as in name.

But Miss Percival was of another opinion when Madeleine brought her the news of what had occurred. After she had read the dispatch which gave the latest report of Raynor's condition, she exclaimed:

"How like him! Anybody else would have been killed outright—as those other poor men were,—but not he! Very likely he will survive and get well again. O Madeleine, isn't it dreadful?"

"It is very dreadful," Madeleine agreed gravely, "if you mean his condition."

"I mean the fact that he wasn't killed at once, like the others," Nina declared unhesitatingly. "Of course he may die, as those about him seem to expect; but *I* don't believe that he will."

"Neither do I," said Madeleine, quietly.

"And yet why shouldn't you believe it?" Nina challenged, turning upon her. "There's really not the faintest reason for thinking otherwise, except that one is so anxious that he should die—and you are not *that!*"

"No, I am not that," Madeleine replied, with the same quietness. "It is not only wrong to desire any one's death, but, especially in a case like this, it would seem to me terrible to do so. After such a life, to be hurled out of the world—the only world to which he has ever given a thought—without time to repent or atone in any way! If you realized what this means, you could not feel as you do about him!"

"Oh, yes, I could!" Nina returned. "For, as I have told you before, I am quite sure that no amount of time would ever make George Raynor think of repentance or atonement."

"You are talking of what you don't understand. The grace of God can do even more wonderful things than that."

"But is the grace of God likely to be given to him? The suggestion seems to me utterly absurd."

"Nina, what an absolute pagan you are! The grace of God in sufficient measure to save the soul is given to everyone; and even for those who have disregarded this, additional and extraordinary grace may sometimes be obtained by the prayers and sacrifices of others."

"Madeleine, you know that I dislike such ideas, and that I don't believe in them. Besides, who on earth is there foolish enough to offer prayers and sacrifices for George Raynor's soul?"

"Again I must tell you that you are talking of what you don't understand," Madeleine answered. "Such prayers and sacrifices are constantly being offered."

"By whom?"

"By many souls who are vowed to the work of intercession and expiation."

"Oh!" Nina glanced at her suspiciously. "Well, all I can say is that I don't believe in such work. In my opinion, people must say their own prayers and make their own sacrifices. And therefore I haven't any faith in the possibility of a repentance won by others for such a person as George Raynor; and I'm quite sure that the sooner he is taken out of this world, the better it will be for him as well as for you."

To this positive assertion, delivered with an air of absolute certainty, Madeleine did not reply; and after a little while the two friends separated for the night. But the excitement produced by the news they had received made it difficult even for Nina to sleep; and when, an hour or two later, she heard a slight movement in Madeleine's room, she rose and opened the door between the two apartments.

What she had expected to see, she saw.

Madeleine was kneeling on a *priedieu* before the ebony crucifix, with its white Figure, which hung against the pale-blue wall. Her face was lifted toward the supreme emblem of God's pity amd man's hope; and something in its expression suddenly filled Nina with a wild fear, almost unintelligible to herself. In her soft slippers she moved swiftly and noiselessly across the floor, and, seizing Madeleine's shoulder, shook her violently.

"What are you doing?" she cried. "What madness are you about?"

"Nina!" Madeleine, who had not heard the sound of the opening door, turned in startled amazement, and rose to her feet. "How did you come here?" she asked. "And are you distracted?"

"*I!* No, but *you* are!" Nina retorted. "You can't deny that you were praying for that man."

"Why should I deny it?"

"Praying for him to live! Oh, the mad folly of it! And perhaps doing even worse—offering some sacrifice for his worthless soul! Madeleine" (indignation subsided to entreaty), "surely you wouldn't do such a thing as that!"

"But I thought," Madeleine reminded her, "that you didn't believe in the efficacy of prayers and sacrifices. Why, then, should you be so much concerned, even if I were doing what you suspect?"

"Because it is not possible to be absolutely

sure about such matters," Nina was driven to admit. "And it isn't well to take chances, and—and the whole idea is unhealthy and dreadful. Hasn't he done you enough harm, the man who is lying yonder dying or dead," she demanded, with a return to the high key of indignation, "that you must give him an opportunity to do you more? For even if your prayers and sacrifices haven't any effect up there" (she cast a hasty glance toward the ceiling), "they will have an effect on you. Instead of taking and enjoying the freedom that seems about to come to you, you will feel bound to abjure some other chance of happiness in life, in order to save a soul that is not worth saving, and isn't entitled to a thought from you. It is terrible. It forces one to think that a religion which teaches such ideas is neither more nor less than positive insanity."

Madeleine, who was leaning against the *priedieu*, from which she had risen while Nina poured forth this torrent of words, now looked up at the white Figure hanging on the cross above her.

"Nina," she said gently, "you know that I have never tried to preach to you, so perhaps you will forgive me for one word now. Have you never thought where we learn the ideas you consider so dreadful? Have you never reflected that if a religion founded on sacrifice is insanity, we find our warrant for it *there?*"

She pointed to the crucifix as she spoke,

but Nina's eyes refused to follow the gesture.

"I don't wish to discuss anything of that kind," she said hastily. "I consider it almost—er—sacrilegious to make such comparisons, and attempt to imitate what was done once for all, and doesn't need any additional help from us. I am sorry I came, if you are going to talk in this way. I might have known that you wouldn't listen to anything I could say; but I felt overwhelmed with horror when I saw you kneeling here, and an instinct told me what you were doing. Madeleine" (in her anxiety she caught hold of the soft silken kimono the other was wearing), "you haven't done it, have you? You haven't pledged yourself to any sacrifice for that wretched creature?"

"He is indeed so wretched a creature—wretched in every sense," Madeleine said, "that you must forgive me, dear, if in this his desperate extremity, when there is nobody else on earth that I know of to say a prayer for him, I have prayed that God will grant him sufficient life and consciousness to repent of his sins, and the grace necessary for that repentance. And to obtain this, why should I not offer, in union with what was paid there" (again she glanced at the crucifix), "my own poor little coin of sacrifice? We should surely be willing to give something in return, when we ask such great favors."

"For him,—for *him!*" Nina groaned, as if overcome by this confirmation of her fears. She

sank down on the *priedieu*, but with no intention of prayer, and covered her face with her hands. "O Madeleine," she wailed, "I couldn't have believed it even of you! Was there ever anything more utterly undeserved, more wildly uncalled for? I hope he is already dead,—I hope so! And if he is" (she lifted her face with a sudden gleam of hope on it), "then it will all amount to nothing, your offer of sacrifice, will it not? You won't feel yourself bound to anything, if you haven't obtained what you asked?"

"Nina, dear" (Madeleine's hand was on her shoulder), "I think you had better go back to bed. It is very good of you to care so much about what I do, and I want you to understand that I haven't made any rash offer of any kind. I have simply promised that I will accept whatever God sends, do whatever He demands of me; and you know we ought to be willing to promise as much as that under ordinary circumstances. Now let us say good-night again, and wait for what to-morrow will bring."

"If it brings the news of his death, will you be satisfied that nothing is demanded of you?" Nina inquired, with a persistence which had its root in doubt.

"We can never be satisfied that nothing is demanded of us," Madeleine replied; "but we may always be sure that God's way of answering our prayers is for the best. Whatever we hear, I shall feel that."

"Of course what we shall hear is that he is dead," Nina consoled herself by thinking after she had returned to her own room and her own couch. "There wasn't even a shadow of hope of anything else held out in the dispatch about him, and it's absurd to imagine that Madeleine's prayers and mad offers of sacrifice could change his physical condition. Miracles don't happen, and that would be something like a miracle,—and a miracle without an object; for one's wildest imagination fails to conceive George Raynor as repenting of his sins. In her idealism she has forgotten, poor child! what he really is,—what a mixture of brute and devil. No, no, Providence will not let her suffer any more on his account; one may be quite certain of that. Of course it would have been much better if he had been killed immediately, and she had no chance to torment herself in this foolish manner." (Nina felt unable to forbear this criticism of the power which she vaguely called Providence.) "But I won't allow myself to entertain any other thought than that we shall hear of his death to-morrow."

These positive assurances to herself were, however, somewhat on the order of a boy's whistling in the dark to keep up his courage. Underneath, Nina was well aware that she felt not only a fear, but something approaching to a conviction, that the news she wished to hear she would not hear,—that George Raynor

would not be taken out of the world as promptly as seemed to her desirable; but that her first feeling would be justified, when she had cried, "Those about him seem to expect him to die, but *I* don't!"

It was not a consoling reflection, either, that Madeleine had unhesitatingly agreed with her in this opinion. Necessarily, Madeleine knew no more about the matter than she did; but, notwithstanding her modern materialism, Nina possessed the vein of superstition from which even the most enlightened of modern intellects are not wholly free, and she had a definite suspicion that Madeleine's conviction had come to her through sources which could not be questioned. "She seemed so confident about it," Nina thought; and yet there were the prayer and the offer of the coin of sacrifice! It was all incomprehensible. Nothing appeared certain except that Catholics were, with their objectionable mysticism, very uncomfortable people to be associated with, and that there was no telling to what lengths an ill-regulated passion for sacrifice might lead one who was ready to give whatever she fancied to be demanded of her.

CHAPTER XV.

NINA'S fears were verified the next day by the news which came from George Raynor. He was not dead; and those about him found themselves unable to say how long he might survive, although his condition was still declared to be quite hopeless. After reading the dispatch which gave this report, Madeleine silently handed it to Nina, who on her part made no comment whatever when she returned it; though the glance of her eye and the set of her mouth were sufficiently expressive to render words unnecessary. A moment later she rose abruptly and went away to her studio, where she fell to mixing paints with a vehemence which was in some degree a physical outlet for inward anger. As she left the room, Madeleine turned to Mrs. Wynne, who had brought the telegram.

"You must excuse Nina," she said. "She is—I hardly know how to express it—very much upset by this news."

"I am very much upset myself," Mrs Wynne replied frankly; "and, therefore, I can sympathize with her. I hardly slept last night for thinking of you as free, and able to be happy at last (it seemed such a beautiful

reward for the sacrifices you have made); and I even planned the cablegram I would send to John to-day. Then with morning came—*this!* I am ashamed to confess how disappointed I felt. And I can't cover it by saying, as people so often do, that 'it would be better for the poor creature to die and be relieved of his suffering'; for I'm aware that we don't in the least know whether or not it would be better for him."

"We may be sure that it would not, since he is still living," Madeleine said. "I know," she added, "that you and Nina are both thinking of me, and that your kindness leads you to desire that things shall be made smooth for me. But you won't misunderstand me perhaps if I say that I have an instinct of—other purposes."

"What kind of purposes?" Mrs. Wynne asked, with a glance of apprehension not unlike Nina's.

"Ah, that I don't know!" Madeleine answered. "It will no doubt be made clear in time. But I am now only certain that the happiness of which you are good enough to dream, and of which I have myself dreamed, is not intended for me. And so—well, I hope you will not send any cablegrams."

"Not even if—if what appears to be inevitable" (Mrs. Wynne pointed to the telegram of the morning) "comes to pass?"

"Let us wait until it does come to pass

before deciding what we will do in that case," Madeleine replied quietly.

"And something in her tone," Mrs. Wynne told her husband, when she was later repeating the conversation to him, "made me afraid—yes, positively *afraid* to ask anything more."

"Why should you have been afraid?" Mr. Wynne inquired in a man's unimaginative fashion.

"Because," Mrs. Wynne replied, "the impression was strongly conveyed to me that, if I pressed the subject further, I might hear something which I should be sorry to know."

"But if you knew that much, you must have had an idea of what you would hear; so why not have allowed the matter to be made clear?"

"O Richard, don't be dense!" Mrs. Wynne begged. "There are many occasions in life when we shrink from having our fears confirmed by positive assurance, and this was such an occasion."

"My dear, if you haven't learned yet that my intellect is not very subtle, the sooner you learn it the better," Mr. Wynne informed her. "Don't be disgusted, therefore, if I ask you to state plainly what you were afraid of hearing."

"Plainly, then," his wife answered, "I was afraid of hearing that Madeleine has found a new application for the coin of sacrifice."

"You don't mean with regard to this man who has already done her so much harm?"

"I mean just that. I dared not question her; for, as I've said, there are some things of which one would rather not be assured. But I believe that she has offered to sacrifice her happiness to obtain for him—Heaven only knows what, for I don't in the least see what she could hope to obtain."

"A good death perhaps."

"But how *could* a man like that possibly have a good death—in the Catholic sense? I don't wish to be irreverent, but it seems as if such a thing would require a miracle almost beyond the power of God."

"I think that you *are* a trifle irreverent," Mr. Wynne remarked. "Nothing is beyond the power of God."

"I express myself badly," Mrs. Wynne said. "Necessarily, nothing is beyond the power of God; but we know that He does not coerce our will even with His grace, and that as men have lived so they generally die; because there would need to be a transformation of the whole nature to make anything else possible, and such transformations do not occur at the hour of death."

"It strikes me that you are too much inclined to dogmatize," Mr. Wynne told her. "Such transformations have occurred in rare cases."

"Hardly in a case like this. If you had ever seen the man you would comprehend

that he is so perfect a type of the animal that it is difficult to believe that he has a soul at all."

"And yet, if you are right in your suspicion, Mrs. Raynor is ready to sacrifice herself to save that dormant soul. She must believe the thing to be possible."

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Wynne sighed. "I suppose she believes it—and that is what makes the tragedy. It is terrible that she should sacrifice herself so—so uselessly."

"But how can you possibly tell whether or not she will be sacrificing herself uselessly?"

"I can tell that the value of the thing sacrificed is out of all proportion to the value of the thing for which the sacrifice is to be made," Mrs. Wynne declared. "There is no good in talking to me, Richard! I know the heroic view, but I simply can not rise to it. I can not be reconciled to such a thing as this. I was depressed enough when I carried that dispatch to her this morning, but what I felt in going was not to be compared to the depression with which I came away."

"And yet you acknowledge that she said nothing to warrant such depression."

"It is not necessary that things should be *said:* one feels them, especially in the case of a person like Madeleine. And I could see that Miss Percival fears exactly the same thing that I do."

"Which is, apparently, that Mrs. Raynor

will bind herself by some vow of sacrifice that will prevent her marrying John Maitland when her husband is obliging enough to die."

"Putting John out of the question," Mrs. Wynne said hastily, "you must admit that it would be dreadful for her to do anything of the kind."

Mr. Wynne shook his head.

"I may be—no doubt I am—a dull man, mentally and spiritually," he said; "but I couldn't admit that, unless I knew more than it is possible for me to know of what might be gained by it."

"Richard, you make me ashamed of myself!" Mrs. Wynne exclaimed. "I grant that I am thinking more perhaps than I ought of John, but I am really thinking most of *her*. She is such an exquisite creature, she has suffered so much and acted so nobly, that I can not endure the thought of her binding herself to any further sacrifice after God has set her free."

"In reply to that," Mr. Wynne observed. "I can only suggest that it would be well to wait until she has been set free."

"That is exactly what she said herself," Mrs. Wynne replied. "And indeed there is no telling what the next news from that man may be. Did you request that further reports of his condition should be sent to you?"

"I requested that messages should be sent to me regularly as long as his condition remains

critical," Mr. Wynne replied. "I thought that you and Mrs. Raynor would desire as much."

Mrs. Wynne looked at him gratefully.

"It is a great comfort to know that you will always do what one desires, without needing to be reminded of it," she said.

And so for several days the telegraphed reports continued to come to Mr. Wynne with as much regularity as if the man lying desperately injured in the south of France were his brother; and in these reports there was an astonishing sameness, an astonishing lack of change in the condition described. Life appeared to linger in the shattered frame with a wonderful tenacity; and those about the patient seemed to have ceased to expect immediate death, although the nature of his desperate injuries precluded all hope of his recovery. These dispatches were taken or sent to Madeleine as soon as they arrived; and Nina never failed, when she read them, to cast a glance of reproach at her, as if saying, "This is your fault!" But she did not again utter remonstrance, as on the night she burst in upon her at her prayers. Evidently she had learned that remonstrance was of no avail, and she waited with a certain degree of resigned philosophy for the end; only relieving her mind by informing Carruthers that she found the whole situation disgusting.

"I presume," he remarked tentatively, "that

you are alluding to the fact that the man doesn't—er—"

"Die, and end the matter," Nina said bluntly. "If that shocks you, I can't help it."

"It doesn't shock me in the least," he assured her. "On the contrary, since it appears to be highly desirable from every point of view that he should die, I agree with you that the sooner the matter is ended the better. But except on his own account—poor devil!—there seems no particular reason for being disgusted at his delay in leaving a world which he has not adorned."

"That," Nina replied, "is all you know about it!"

"Yes, that is all I know about it," he assented. "Is there anything else to know?"

"There's a great deal else," she replied; "but I don't see that there's any good in telling it to you."

"I beg to differ with you," he returned promptly. "There's always good in confiding in a sympathetic friend. There's the relief to your own mind, and there's the gratification of the friend's curiosity—or, let us call it his interest. I'll take another cup of that rather washy tea of yours while you tell me all about it."

"The tea isn't washy," Nina said, as she poured it out; "and I'm not going to tell you anything. In fact, I haven't anything to

tell. The situation, as the French say, 'jumps at the eyes.'"

"It doesn't jump at mine," Carruthers declared, while he added a liberal infusion of rum to the cup of lemon-colored liquid he had received. "I can't perceive anything, except matter for gratitude rather than disgust, in the fact that the man is certainly going to die, and leave our charming friend, Mrs. Raynor, free—that is, conscience-free—to marry our esteemed friend, John Maitland."

"But suppose he *doesn't* die?" Nina cried, as if exasperated. "Suppose that there's a force at work to keep him alive indefinitely, in the hope of doing some good to his wretched soul, and that when he is finally taken away Madeleine will be no more conscience-free than she is now to seek her own happiness?"

Carruthers stared at her across the tea table as if he thought she had lost her mind.

"Really," he said, "I find myself quite unable to suppose anything of the kind. What possible force is there to keep the man alive indefinitely for such a purpose as you mention? I'm sure medical science doesn't recognize it."

"Medical science, no!" Nina retorted scornfully. "Medical science doesn't recognize anything beyond our bodies, but we are fools if we don't know that our bodies are of value only for what they contain."

"My dear girl, I hope you haven't become a mystic!"

"If recognizing that the soul is greater than the body is to become a mystic, then I have become one," she told him. "And I am, moreover, quite certain that the soul has sometimes at least a wonderful influence over the body."

"The influence of mind over matter is acknowledged by the medical science which you flout," he reminded her.

"I am not talking of anything that medical science acknowledges," Nina observed mysteriously. "I am talking of a force that is set in motion by prayer—oh, don't shrug your shoulders in that detestable manner, or I shall have nothing more to say to you!"

"How can I help shrugging my shoulders?" he inquired. "You must know that what you are saying leads directly to belief in what is called miracles."

"And why shouldn't I believe in miracles, if I like?" she demanded. "They are no more extraordinary than a hundred other things that neither you nor any one else can explain."

"That may be," Carruthers conceded; "but haven't we wandered rather far, unless you are implying that Mr. Raynor is kept alive by the application of miraculous force,—and from what I have heard of him I should hardly fancy that he was a subject for that kind of thing?"

"He is not," Nina stated emphatically. "It

is absurd even to think of him as a subject for it. And yet something is going on that I don't understand. Why doesn't he die?"

"Evidently because his injuries are not so severe as they were at first supposed to be," Carruthers replied. "How can you possibly imagine anything else?"

"It doesn't at all matter what reasons I may have for imagining anything else," she returned. "I am not going to tell them to so unsympathetic a person as yourself. But you'll admit, I presume, that if a certain effect follows a certain cause, we have a right to attribute the effect to the cause?"

"That sounds obvious," he answered; "but it also sounds like a trap; and, being a cautious person, I am not prepared to assent until I know the nature of the cause and effect in question."

She laughed.

"Cautiousness is a new virtue with you," she said. "But if I told you about the cause and effect in question, you would only scoff instead of understanding; so we will change the subject."

Despite vigorous remonstrance on Carruthers' part, the subject was accordingly changed, and he obtained no further information on a matter concerning which Nina would have found it extremely difficult to explain herself. Nothing indeed was clear in her own mind except that she had a suspicion almost

amounting to a belief that Madeleine had in some manner, which she would have described as "occult," set certain forces at work on behalf of the man whose death was so much to be desired. It was all, in her opinion, "superstitious," "mystical," and absurd; yet she was herself sufficiently superstitious, in the true sense of the term, to believe in what she would have thus scoffingly described.

Presently Carruthers went away; and she was sitting alone in the firelit dusk of the short winter day, when the door of the salon opened and Madeleine came in. Nina, glancing up as she entered, thought that she had never seen her look more lovely than as she advanced into the circle of firelight, in her outdoor dress of dark velvet, with the rich furs which set off the delicate beauty of her face and the lustre of her golden hair. The keenness of the air without had brought unusual color to her cheeks, and her large dark eyes were shining with the glow of some inward feeling.

Miss Percival raised herself in her chair and uttered an exclamation.

"You look so ravishingly lovely," she cried, "that I want to paint you just as you are! Will you come into the studio, and let me make a sketch, at least?"

Madeleine shook her head, as she sank down into a seat before the fire and unfastened her furs.

"'I pray thee hold me excused,'" she said. "I am a little tired now."

"Let me make you a cup of tea," Nina offered. "That will refresh you."

"No, thanks! I have just come from one of the tea-rooms, where I went with Mrs. Wynne," Madeleine replied. She paused a moment before adding gravely: "I have heard some news, Nina."

Nina glanced at her sharply.

"What is it?" she asked. "I suppose it relates to that odious man. Is he dead at last?"

"No, he is not dead. The report to-day is that he is sufficiently better to be brought to Paris for treatment."

Miss Percival fell back in her chair, and was silent for a full minute. Then she said: "I'm not in the least surprised. I knew how it would be. You couldn't be satisfied without setting all kinds of spiritual agencies at work on his behalf; and of course since it was eminently desirable that he should die, he has been kept alive. What you expect to gain by it I don't know, but I hope you are gratified at the result of your efforts."

"My dear Nina, this is really most ridiculous!" Madeleine remonstrated. "You can't be so foolish as to believe that I have been able to exert any influence to keep George Raynor alive."

"You admitted that you were praying for

him, and what is the good of prayers if they have no effect?"

"I was not praying that he might live—for life and death are in the hands of God,—but that he might have some spiritual illumination, sufficient to save his soul, before he died. I told you that when we talked of this before."

"Yes, but you also told me that, in order to obtain what you asked, you had been so wildly foolish as to make, in accordance with your dreadful Catholic ideas, some kind of an offer of sacrifice. You can't deny it, and there is no telling what the effect of *that* has been."

Madeleine found herself unable to refrain from smiling at the other's tragic earnestness.

"You are kind enough to attribute more value to what I offered than I can possibly imagine that it possessed," she said. "Don't let us discuss the matter. Such things should not be talked about. They concern only oneself and God."

"Are you quite sure of that?" Nina demanded quickly. "Doesn't this matter concern some one beside yourself? Oh, I might as well speak plainly! To gain a remote, impossible spiritual benefit for the man who has treated you so shamefully, are you not ready to sacrifice not only your own happiness, but also that of the man who loves you devotedly, and has conclusively proved his love?"

A look of pain came into Madeleine's eyes as she rose.

"I have already told you that I can not discuss this matter," she said. "It is quite useless, and would be useless even if I could make you understand things which it seems impossible for you to understand. Only I must tell you that you are talking nonsense when you imply that I have any power over a situation which I have not created, or—or that I can sacrifice the happiness of a man who has no place in my life."

"He may have, however, unless you put some obstacle in the way."

"You are incorrigible!" Madeleine declared. "Listen now, for this is my last word on the subject. I have asked nothing and I desire nothing but what is according to the will of God. I have indeed begged a great grace for one who has no one else to ask it for him; but I have promised nothing, as I think I told you before, which we should not be willing to promise even under ordinary circumstances."

"But these," Nina remarked in last protest, "are not ordinary circumstances."

"Perhaps they are not so extraordinary as they seem to us," Madeleine suggested. "But, however that may be, we can certainly trust Divine Providence to deal with them for the best."

Then she left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a week later when Mr. Wynne, coming in one day to luncheon, found his wife awaiting him with a very tragic countenance.

"What is the matter, Helen?" he asked. "No bad news of any kind, I hope?"

"Very bad news," Mrs. Wynne replied. "That man Raynor is so much better that he has been able to send a message to Madeleine asking her to come to see him."

"My dear," Mr. Wynne remonstrated, "I'm afraid that you are really forgetting Christian charity, so far as this unfortunate man is concerned."

"Oh, I know that I am!" Mrs. Wynne said. "It makes me positively unhappy. But what can I do? The matter grows worse and worse; for—do you know in what way he has sent this message to her?"

"How should I know?"

"Why, he has sent it through *us!*" Mrs. Wynne's tone was as tragic as her face in making the announcement. "Richard, you can't tell how dreadfully I feel in thinking that he would not have known that she was in Paris if he had not seen her in this hotel with me. And now, not knowing how or where

to find her, the communication is sent through you! It seems intolerable that we, of all people, should be selected as the intermediaries to bring her into connection with him."

"It is certainly not what we would have desired," Mr. Wynne remarked; "but we could not have foreseen, and therefore could not have prevented it."

"But that doesn't make it less dreadful," Mrs. Wynne complained; "and I'm inclined to say that I will not be forced into playing such a part."

"But how," her husband inquired, "can you possibly avoid doing so?"

"I hardly know," she answered slowly; and then, pausing, looked at him, holding the while her lower lip between her teeth, which he knew to be an old trick of hers when in doubt.

"Well, what is it?" he asked at last. "What are you thinking about?"

"*This!*" she answered, taking up a letter from the table beside her, and holding it out to him. "Here is the message which I feel as if I could not endure to give to her."

"Helen, I am amazed at you!" said Mr. Wynne, as he took the letter, which was addressed to himself, and drew forth the following brief and business-like communication:

DEAR SIR:—I am instructed by Mr. George Raynor, of whose injured condition you are

aware, since we have been in receipt of, and hereby beg to acknowledge and thank you for, your kind inquiries about him, to request you to be good enough to inform Mrs. Madeleine Raynor, whose address he does not know, but with whom he has reason to believe that you are in communication, that he desires to see her, and will be deeply obliged if she will come to see him at address given above. He adds that his condition must be his excuse not only for asking this favor of her but also for troubling you.

Trusting that you may be able to assist him in the matter, since he seems extremely anxious to see Mrs. Raynor, and his state is very precarious, I am,

Yours truly,
M. F. CONYERS.

"Hum!" Mr. Wynne commented, when his rapid glance had covered these few lines of writing. "I don't know who M. F. Conyers may be—probably a friend, or more probably merely a secretary,—but there's a personal and solicitous touch about the last words which seems to imply that it would be well to lose no time in communicating this request to Mrs. Raynor. I don't understand" (he looked reproachfully at his wife) "how your conscience has allowed you to delay sending it to her at once."

"My conscience has had nothing at all to say on the subject," Mrs. Wynne replied;

"for of course I know that it can not be withheld from her—"

"Why on earth should you wish to withhold it from her if you could? The poor creature no doubt merely desires to make his peace with her before he leaves the world."

"I have no idea that he is going to leave the world,—that is, at the present time," Mrs. Wynne answered; "and I doubt whether his wish to see her has not a much more selfish basis than to make his peace with her. But, however that may be" (she sighed impatiently), "I fully recognize that the message must be given to her; and I have not transmitted it only because it has been less than an hour since the letter was delivered, and also because she is due here to lunch with me at the present time; for we were going out together this afternoon."

"Oh, she's due here, is she?" Mr. Wynne looked a little dismayed, and thrust the letter hastily back into his wife's hand. "Well, you had better give her this as soon as she comes. I must—er—wash my hands before going down to lunch."

Mrs. Wynne looked with a smile after the figure that so abruptly dived into the chamber which adjoined the sitting-room of their suite; but she knew the masculine dread of anything savoring of emotion too well to be surprised by the flight. Then the smile faded as she glanced at the clock and realized that Madeleine

would no doubt appear in a few minutes. She rose and walked across the floor; while the same feeling of indignant revolt against the position in which she found herself—that of being forced to convey a message she instinctively disliked and distrusted—which she had expressed to her husband when he entered, rose again strongly in her breast. She looked at the letter in her hand, and then at the grate filled with glowing coal.

"I should like to put it there!" she said, unconsciously speaking aloud.

"Would you?" a soft, half-laughing voice behind her asked. "Then why not do so?"

"Madeleine?" Mrs. Wynne turned to find herself facing the person of whom her thoughts were full. "I—I did not hear you come in."

"No: you were too absorbed to hear me," Madeleine answered; "and I never heard anything more full of dramatic intensity than your tone. I hope it is not anything of importance that you would like to put *there?*"

"I don't know whether it is or not," Mrs. Wynne replied. "But you can judge for yourself, since it concerns you."

"Concerns me!" Madeleine repeated, gazing with startled eyes at the letter which the other, with a sudden impulse, extended to her. "What is it? How does it concern me?"

"It is a message from your—from Mr. Raynor," Mrs. Wynne told her, gently enough now. "I wish I could have put it into the

fire; but since I couldn't, take it, dear, and read it. There's no way of sparing you."

The compassionate sympathy of her tone seemed to act on Madeleine with strengthening effect. She put out her hand and took the letter.

"There is no reason why I should be spared," she said as she opened it.

The interval of silence which followed seemed long to Mrs. Wynne; but in reality, measured by the clock, it was a very short time before Madeleine looked up from the sheet of paper which she held, and said quietly:

"Of course I must go."

"Yes," Mrs. Wynne assented in a fatalistic tone; "I knew you would say that. And I suppose there is nothing else for you to do."

"Nothing else," Madeleine echoed. She sat down with an air of preoccupation, and gazed for a minute or two into the glowing heart of the fire, where Mrs. Wynne had longed to cast the letter which she still held in her hand. Presently, looking up again, she said meditatively: "I wonder what it is that he wants?"

"Richard thinks that it is to make his peace with you before he dies," Mrs. Wynne replied, in a tone which sufficiently indicated her own incredulity on this point. "Whatever he wants, it is a most inconsiderate request, and demands a very painful effort on your part."

"Yes, it will be painful," Madeleine agreed,

with the same quietness of manner and tone; "but that does not matter, if there is anything to be gained by it."

"But what is there possibly to be gained?"

"That we can not tell," Madeleine answered.

She paused, and her gaze returned to the red depths of the fire during another interval of silence, which Mrs. Wynne, on her part, felt no inclination to break. For she was that rather unusual person, a woman who knew when there was nothing to be said, and who on such occasions refrained from useless words. She was intensely surprised by the quietness of Madeleine's attitude,—by her lack of complaint, or of protest against what was demanded of her; and yet she told herself that she should not be surprised, since this unhesitating acquiescence clearly had its root in the mental and spiritual condition she had already divined, and, like Nina, had regarded with instinctive fear and distrust,—which fear and distrust, it is almost unnecessary to say, were not for the condition itself but for the consequences that she foresaw might in one way or another follow from it.

One of these consequences was at hand now. A voice which had forfeited all right to be heard uttered a call, which under the circumstances possessed a certain piteousness; and the soul that not long before had shrunk in horror from the faintest echo of that voice, rose now in quiet strength to answer the call.

For there was no manner of doubt of the answer. If this had not been already made clear, it was unmistakably indicated when Madeleine spoke next.

"I will call up by telephone the address given here," she said, "and ask if he is able to see me this afternoon. There is no reason for delay."

"I suppose not," Mrs. Wynne found herself again forced to agree. "But would you not like Richard to call up the house for you? That letter, you know, is addressed to him."

"I should be very glad if he would," Madeleine replied. "But are you, then, expecting him?"

"I am not expecting him, for he is here," Mrs. Wynne answered, looking toward the curtain-hung door from which Mr. Wynne now emerged.

As Madeleine rose to shake hands with him, he said, in a tone which showed his consideration:

"Don't trouble to tell me anything. I have read the letter which you have in your hand, and I knew what your answer would be before I heard you utter it; for, being so near, I could not avoid hearing what you said. And now it will give me great pleasure to go and telephone for you."

"You are more than kind!" Madeleine told him. "Say, then, that I am ready to pay the visit requested at any time, but that I should

like to know what hour will be best for Mr. Raynor to see me." Then, as Mr. Wynne left the room, she turned to his wife and said fervently:

"How can I ever be grateful enough for the chance—which I am sure was no chance—of meeting you two dear people!"

"O my dear," Mrs. Wynne cried, with a sound of tears in her voice, "I have been regretting bitterly that you ever *did* meet us; for that man whom you are going to see would never have known where to find you if he did not possess the clue of having seen you with me."

"And do you possibly regret that?" Madeleine asked in astonishment. "Don't you understand—you who understand so much!—that this is something for which I am also grateful? God only knows what it may lead to. But, whatever it is, I can never forget that, in a certain sense, it will have come to pass through you."

And, as on another occasion, Mrs. Wynne felt herself afraid to ask what it was that the speaker thought might come to pass, and which (her tone implied) would be matter for gratitude.

A few minutes later Mr. Wynne returned, bringing the reply to his telephoned question. Mr. Raynor, he had been informed, would be able to see Mrs. Raynor at half-past three o'clock, if it would suit her to come at that hour.

"I answered that it would suit you," Mr. Wynne added; "so the appointment is fixed for that time. I hope that I made no mistake in settling it without consulting you?"

"You made no mistake at all," Madeleine assured him. "I am ready to go at any hour, and the time fixed suits me perfectly. I wonder" (she glanced wistfully at Mrs. Wynne) "if I might venture to ask a great favor of one whose kindness seems inexhaustible?"

"You can ask anything you like," Mrs. Wynne said quickly. "But first let me ask *you* if you would care for me to accompany you when you go to pay this visit?"

"It is impossible for me to say how much I should care,—what a comfort and support your companionship would be to me!" Madeleine exclaimed. "Of course you know that is the favor I was going to beg."

"I never had the remotest idea of allowing you to go alone, unless you declined to let me go with you," Mrs. Wynne told her. "And now we will have luncheon."

When luncheon was over, there was still a considerable interval of time to be disposed of before the hour appointed for the visit; and Mrs. Wynne looked interrogatively at Madeleine when Mr. Wynne proposed to call a carriage, in order that they might take a short turn in the Bois.

"That seems to me a good suggestion,"

she said, "since we can not carry out our original plan for the afternoon."

Madeleine hesitated an instant before answering, and then said:

"If I may speak frankly, I have been thinking that I would like to go to the Passionist church for a short time before paying this visit, which will be a trial in many ways."

"I should have thought of that," Mrs. Wynne observed hastily; "and of course it is best. But there are churches nearer at hand than that of the Passionists in the Avenue Hoche, you know."

"Yes, I know," Madeleine replied; "but the address given to us chances to be in the Avenue Hoche—had you not noticed that?—so we can take the church on our way to keep the appointment."

Mrs. Wynne looked unaccountably a little startled.

"There's no earthly reason why he should not be in the Avenue Hoche," she said, as if arguing with herself; "but it seems odd."

"What is there odd about it?" her husband asked, glancing at her with surprise. "Why should Mr. Raynor not be in the Avenue Hoche any more than in any of the other avenues or streets of Paris?"

"I have said that there is no reason why he should not be there," Mrs. Wynne replied. "It just struck me that things are sometimes curiously linked together,—by accident most

likely; but, again, possibly not altogether by accident. It is a coincidence, at least, that Madeleine was received into the Church in the Passionist chapel in the Avenue Hoche, that we met her there, that it is through us that this man has been put into communication with her, and that she can now take the church so conveniently on her way to keep the appointment which he has forced on her."

"Human events often exhibit a tendency toward coincidence," Mr. Wynne remarked; "but we should not attach too much importance to anything of the kind. It leads to superstition."

"I am not in the least afraid of being led to superstition by this kind of coincidence," Mrs. Wynne returned. "The effect is quite the other way. It seems to give us a glimpse of the design which controls the happenings of life, and teaches us to wait for the outcome of things we don't like with more patience than we might otherwise be able to exercise. One remembers that—

All things by immortal power
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linkéd are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling a star.

Now order the carriage, and we'll go, that Madeleine may have time to ask for the strength she will surely need."

CHAPTER XVII.

How much strength Madeleine needed for the ordeal that was before her, only her own shrinking heart knew; not even to the friend who was so kindly sympathetic did she express the terrible reluctance which seemed dragging her back, the sickening dread she felt at coming again into contact with the man whose cruelty had darkened her young life and seared her spirit. But from the time when she bent her neck to the yoke of Faith, when she recognized the authority of the Church of God, and acknowledged that human law has no power to break the bond of marriage, which death alone can sever, she had not ceased to ask the grace to do whatever might be demanded of her in fulfilment of that still existing obligation, and in atonement for having adopted the standard of a godless world in the matter of divorce.

It was no doubt the grace obtained by this prayer which enabled her, when the news of Raynor's terrible accident came, to spend the hours of an unforgettable night in struggling, as it were, for his soul; in praying that he might be spared long enough to realize the need of repentance for the excesses of a sinful life;

and which led her, with an heroic impulse of generosity, to offer her own life and happiness to obtain this inestimable favor for one who had so little deserved it. Rising at last exhausted, she had a distinct consciousness that her prayer had been heard; and she felt no surprise, therefore, when the next day, and many succeeding days, brought news of life still lingering in the shattered frame; nor did she doubt that some call to the fulfilment of her promise, some demand for payment of the coin of sacrifice, would sooner or later reach her.

And now it had come. Now she was summoned to take the first steps upon what she felt instinctively would prove a *via crucis*, leading—it was impossible to say to what height of crucifixion. For the more sensitive the nature, the more keenly responsive to every demand upon feeling or emotion, the more does suffering, especially all forms of mental and spiritual suffering, mean to it a martyrdom which natures of coarser fibre are unable even to imagine. Such a martyrdom Madeleine knew herself to be facing; and hence had arisen the longing to cast herself down before the Divine Presence which dwells in every Catholic tabernacle, and beg, with the energy of a soul determined though recoiling, for strength to go forward on the road appointed for her. And it was only natural that her thoughts should have turned with a particular

longing toward the tabernacle in the church of the English Passionists, before which she had knelt so often during her time of preparation for reception into the fold of Christ, where her soul had received extraordinary graces in the past, where the first realization of a still binding moral obligation in the legally discarded marriage tie had come to her, and where she felt that she might ask, with the assurance of a child returning to a familiar home, for the grace and help she needed so sorely now.

In this church, therefore, she and Mrs. Wynne paused on their way to keep the appointment made with Raynor. And since the generous soul rarely fails to win generous gifts from God—so that we might almost say that what we receive is, in a certain degree, proportioned to what we give,—Madeleine did not ask in vain for the strength she required. There was a new expression on her face, a new light shining in her eyes, when she presently rose from her knees and touched Mrs. Wynne on the arm, to signify that it was time to go. Silently they left the church together, and still silently were driven to the address given them, which proved to be that of one of the handsome modern houses which line these (comparatively) new avenues radiating from the Place de l'Etoile. Their cab drew up before a cream-colored facade; and, in answer to an inquiry, the *concierge* directed them to the second floor. When they reached this,

and paused before the door which faced them, Madeleine looked at her companion with mute piteousness for an instant, then made the Sign of the Cross, and, putting out her hand, touched the bell.

The summons was answered almost immediately. The door opened, and a tall young man, of rather prepossessing and distinctly American appearance, stood before them. With a quick glance, he said at once:

"This is Mrs. Raynor, is it not?"

"Yes, I am Mrs. Raynor; and this is my friend Mrs. Wynne," Madeleine answered. "Am I speaking to Mr. Conyers?"

"I was about to introduce myself," the young man went on. "Yes, I'm Conyers. It was I who wrote the note to Mr. Wynne, because we didn't know how else to reach you."

"It was rather clever of you to know that," Madeleine told him as they passed into a salon, which would have been a very pretty and cheerful room if it had not borne unmistakable signs of masculine occupation and disorder.

"Oh, I was with Raynor the day he saw you with Mrs. Wynne in the Hôtel de France!" the young man explained. "After lunch he made some inquiries, and that's how we knew that Mr. and Mrs. Wynne were staying at the hotel, and you were not. Then came Mr. Wynne's telegrams, asking about Raynor; and—

er—well, obviously the way to find you was to address him, so we took that way."

"And found me very quickly, you see," Madeleine said, smiling faintly. "Now before I ask you to let Mr. Raynor know that I am here, will you tell me about his condition—how he is and something of the nature of his injuries?"

"Well, he's better, you know,—astonishingly better," Conyers replied. "Nobody expected him to live an hour when we pulled him out from under the car, he was so awfully crushed, and barely breathing. The way he has held on to life, the doctors say, is most amazing; they all declare they've never seen anything quite like it. At first they said he would die immediately; then they thought he might survive for a day or two, but not longer; and now—well, now I don't believe they know what to think. He's in a frightfully smashed up condition: one foot taken off, hip crushed, spine injured, and the Lord only knows what else besides; but he has grown stronger straight along. He insisted on being brought back to Paris, and he wouldn't hear of a hospital, so I brought him here. These are my sister's apartments; but she's in America, and he and I were occupying them before we went away for the races. Then as soon as I got him settled, with a couple of nurses, he insisted that I should write to Mr. Wynne and ask you to come to see him. And

now may I tell him that you are here? He knows the time you are due, and he's awfully impatient when he has to wait for anything."

"Yes, I know," Madeleine said hastily. "By all means tell him that I am here."

Then, as the young man left the room, she turned and caught her friend's hand in a tight grasp.

"Pray for me," she whispered urgently, "that I may do and say the right thing. It will be so frightfully easy to do or say the wrong thing! One never knew exactly how it was safe to take him; and he was always in such a fearful state when things went otherwise than as he wanted them to go that I can't even faintly imagine how he will bear anything so appalling, so hopeless as this."

"Oh, my dear," Mrs. Wynne cried, "it is a terrible ordeal for you! Is there no way of sparing, of helping you?"

"There can be no question of sparing me," Madeleine answered in the same tense tone. "Only pray that I may not think of myself, that I may think solely of him; above all, that I may say the right thing. Just now I haven't a thought in my mind."

"The thoughts will come, and the right words, don't be afraid! It—it wouldn't do for me to go in with you, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, that would never do! And you couldn't help me in that way. But it is a great help to know that you are praying for

me, and that I will find you here when I come back."

The first feeling of which Madeleine was conscious after she had entered the chamber into which she was presently shown, and heard the door close behind her, was one of compassion so poignant and overmastering that her prayer to forget herself was instantly granted, and she thought only of the piteous wreck of a man who stared at her with sombre eyes, grown larger in an already wasted face, as she crossed the floor to the side of his bed.

"So you've come!" he said, as she paused beside him. "I rather thought you would."

"Didn't you know that I would?" she asked gently, with all the passion of pity which filled her heart expressed in face and voice.

"Well, yes, I suppose I knew," he answered, without graciousness. "You were always soft-hearted to any poor devil down on his luck, and nobody was ever more completely down than I am now. God!" (a spasm of mingled rage and anguish seemed to shake him) "to think what one minute can do! Here was I, as strong, healthy and well as a man could be, and in a minute converted into this—a shattered wreck, crushed, maimed, utterly ruined!"

"But you were spared to live," she said, "where others were killed."

"And you call that being spared?" he asked bitterly. "I'd infinitely rather have been killed

than left alive like this. Do you know how hopelessly I'm injured? Do you know" (again a spasm contracted his face) "that I'll never walk again?"

"I know that you are terribly injured," she replied; "but you have astonished everyone by the manner in which you have rallied, and it may be that you will recover to a degree that you do not now anticipate."

"Recover!" The violent tone with which he echoed her word brought back memories of a past in which such tones had been familiar to her ears. "You don't know what you are talking about! It isn't necessary to enter into particulars of all these infernal doctors say has happened to me; but, according to them, I haven't any body left worth speaking of, only a collection of broken bones and crushed members, good for nothing but to suffer. It's—simply damnable! So don't talk any rot to me about being grateful to be alive. I'm not grateful for such life, and I don't intend to endure it. I'd have ended it before this if I'd had a chance, but I'm so damnably helpless—I shall end it as soon as possible, however. My mind's made up on that score."

"You don't mean," Madeleine gasped, "that you want to kill yourself?"

"What else?" he asked. "What else is there for a man in my condition to do? Don't you see?—don't you understand? *There's not one single thing which has made up life for me*

that I can ever do again. I'm flung here like a broken log, just to lie useless and helpless and suffer until I die. And do you think I'll endure it? No!" (He swore a terrible oath, while his hands clenched in the energy of his passion, and a tide of blood rushed to his face.) "I'll end it just as soon as I can put my hands on the means to do so. You may be sure of that."

"No, no!" Almost unconsciously, overcome by the sense of horror which rushed over her, Madeleine flung herself down on her knees beside the bed. "No, George, you will not dare to do such a thing! What is any suffering you may have to endure here compared to the suffering upon which you would rush if you were so mad as to take your own life?"

"But you don't believe that?" He stared at her in astonishment. "I mean about the suffering hereafter? I didn't know that anybody believed in that now. I thought it belonged to the Dark Ages, before men were—er—enlightened by progress."

"Do you consider it progress to fall from being sons of God and heirs of immortality to the life and death of an animal?" she asked. "It's quite true that many have ceased to believe in eternal punishment, but they forget that denying a thing does not abolish it. And the risk—O George, the risk, if we call it no more than that—is too great to take!"

"Hell couldn't be worse than this!" he

declared passionately. "To lie here and think of what life has been, and what it will be under these conditions,—it is a torture beyond bearing!"

"But a torture which will end," she reminded him, "whereas the other will have no end."

"That's religious rot! I don't believe a word of it!"

"But if it is true, if just possibly it is true. Isn't it better to be on the safe side?" she urged. "As long as you are alive, however much you may be suffering, the grace of God can find and save your soul; but if you fling yourself out of life by your own act, you will have fixed your place and state for all eternity."

"Well, if this isn't the most extraordinary—" He broke off, and lay regarding her with an amazement which seemed altogether beyond his power of expression. "What has come over you?" he demanded. "I don't remember that you were particularly troubled with religion in the past."

"I wasn't,—you are quite right about that."

"But now you talk as if you had had a revelation of some kind. How can you possibly know that if I fling myself out of life, as I'm firmly resolved to do, my place and state will be fixed for all eternity?"

"I know it because I *have* had a revelation,—you are right again about that," she replied. "And I tell you these things on the authority of the Church which speaks in the name of God."

"What Church are you talking of?"

"There is but one which speaks with authority, and tells us, not what we like or wish, but what we must believe; and you know the name of that Church. Everyone knows it. It is the Catholic Church."

"And do you mean that you've become a Catholic?"

"Yes, I have become a Catholic, by the mercy and grace of God."

"Well, I'll be—damned!"

This was not the expression of a determination, and there was no intention of profanity in the exclamation which from force of habit suggested itself as the only one astonishment could utter. Then for a minute there was silence, while Raynor continued to gaze, as if in cumulative amazement, at the woman who still knelt beside his bed.

"This is the very last thing I should have expected to hear of you," he said at last.

"Why?" she asked.

"Isn't it plain enough why?" he returned irritably. "Everybody knows what the Catholic Church thinks about divorce."

"Yes" (Madeleine felt herself quite wonderfully calm), "as you have said, everybody knows that the Catholic Church does not acknowledge the possibility of divorce."

"Then, by entering that Church, you've put it out of your power to marry again."

"By entering the Church I have certainly

put it out of my power to marry again, if I wished to do so."

Again there was an interval of silence, in which Raynor apparently meditated; while Madeleine waited with the same extraordinary sense of calm, as of one sustained by a power outside herself, for his next words. They came at last abruptly:

"You'll not believe it perhaps," he said, "but I'm sorry to hear this. I've always thought you'd find somebody after a while who would make up to you for all you had to bear with me. I know how much that was; I've never denied it, and never defended myself. But I've had the grace to hope that you might one day be happy with a man of your own sort, which *I* never was. And now you've made it impossible."

"I have found something better than the happiness of which you speak," Madeleine told him quietly. "Let us not discuss the subject."

"Very well, then; we'll discuss something else," he replied. "And it's this. Matters being as they are—in other words, since it appears that you've bound yourself over again, although the law has freed you,—I'm at a loss to know why you object to the prospect of being freed, by my finishing an incomplete job, and putting myself out of the world. I should think that, instead of objecting, you'd be delighted to speed me on my outward way."

"That is a dreadful manner of talking," Madeleine said, "even though you do not mean it."

"But I *do* mean it," he asserted with energy. "Considering the part I've played in your life, and the position which you occupy now—a divorced woman in the eyes of the world, and a married woman in the eyes of the Catholic Church,—I regard you as neither more nor less than a fool, in desiring to put any obstacle in the way of a step on my part which would have the effect of freeing you once for all from an anomalous position."

"If desiring to put any and every obstacle in the way of such a step constitutes folly, then you must count me a fool," Madeleine replied. "And I will, moreover, tell you just how much of a fool I am, from your point of view. Since the hour that I heard of your accident (and the first reports declared that you were fatally injured, and could not possibly live), I have never ceased to beg God's mercy for you; and my special petition has been that your life might be spared long enough for you to repent of the sins of a wasted life. Understand that I am not trying to preach to you. I am only telling you what I have done, that you may judge how far I am from desiring a freedom that would come in the way of which you have spoken; and because you may perhaps feel that, if I have gained an extension of life for you—as I firmly believe

that I have,—it would be an act of cowardly ingratitude to cast that life, and the chances it brings, wilfully away, and go to the outer darkness from which I have tried to save you, at a cost of which I will not speak."

"Well, this is certainly the most amazing—" Again words failed, and Raynor lay and simply stared at her. "I'm not sure that you haven't thrown a light on something which has puzzled me," he said presently. "But I don't feel equal to telling you about it just now. As it is, I've talked nearly as much as I can; and yet I haven't said a word of the particular matter I had in mind in asking you to come to see me. It was about affairs at home,—some things I thought you'd be good enough to look after for me when the—end came. Of course I've no right or claim whatever to ask such a favor of you; but, all the same, I believed you wouldn't refuse."

"I would willingly look after anything that I could for you," she answered, as, rising to her feet, she stood by the bed, serene, grave, and, as he felt, strangely strong. "But the end is not coming yet, and it will never come as you have planned."

"I'd like to know how you can be sure of that!" he said in a tone of defiance.

"I am sure," she told him, "because I am confident that God did not hear my prayer and extend your life for such an end."

"We'll talk about that later. I'd like to

hear something more of what you've been doing in my behalf," he said, with a mingling of interest and suspicion. "Will you come to see me again? If you will, I'll promise to be here—as far, that is, as it depends on me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. WYNNE, who waited in great anxiety for Madeleine's return from the distressing interview to which she had gone, was more amazed than can readily be expressed by her appearance when she re-entered the salon. Remembering the aspect with which she went away—the pale face drawn into lines of pain, the eyes dilated with the shadow of fear, the nerves strung to their utmost tension of endurance,—it was difficult to realize that it was the same person who returned with step and bearing which were almost buoyant, with the tense lines smoothed from her face, the lips relaxed to softness, and a light of positive exaltation shining in her eyes, as if fresh from a vision of wondrous things.

"Madeleine!—" Mrs. Wynne exclaimed; and then, remembering the presence of the young man who had been politely making conversation for her benefit during the time of waiting, she gasped quickly: "I—I hope that you found Mr. Raynor better than you expected."

"In some respects, much better," Madeleine replied. She turned to Conyers, who had risen at her entrance. "He had not strength to finish all that he wished to tell

me," she said to him; "so I have promised to come back whenever he feels able to see me again. Will you be kind enough to let me know when I shall return? I will give you my address, so that there may be no delay in communicating with me." She drew a card from the bag which hung on her wrist, and wrote the address on it; adding, in a low, significant tone, as she handed it to him: "I suppose you know that there is one particular danger to be carefully guarded against."

"That he'll kill himself?" Conyers answered, with instant apprehension of her meaning. "Oh, yes! We've had to fight that straight along. The first thing he asked for, as soon as he realized his condition, was his pistol. He cursed me fearfully when I refused to give it to him, but I—er—couldn't take the responsibility. I'd have felt, you know, as if I had killed him myself."

"It would have been almost the same thing," Madeleine assured him gravely. "You would certainly have shared his guilt in equal degree."

"Do you think so?" The query was not unmixed with surprise. "I'm glad you do; for some of his friends, to whom I've spoken of the matter, say that I had no right to prevent his doing as he liked; that if he wanted to put himself out of the world, I shouldn't have prevented it."

"I advise you to keep those friends, as far as possible, away from him; and if it is necessary

to let them see him, do not leave them alone with him," Madeleine said earnestly. "Any one who believes that a man has a right to end his life would be willing to give him the means to do it."

"Well, now you don't know what a relief to my mind it is to hear you talk in this way!" Conyers declared, though surprise seemed deepening in his eyes as he gazed at her. "It was only an instinct that I followed in my refusal; and I've since wondered, especially when those fellows argued as they did, whether I *had* a right to refuse to give him what he wanted. After all, his life is his own—"

"That is just what it is not," Madeleine interposed quickly. "His life is not his own: it belongs to God, who gave it. Surely, as a Christian, you believe this?"

"Really, I—er—can't exactly say," the young man answered, looking as uncomfortable as the average Protestant generally looks when called upon to formulate his hazy beliefs, or when the unaccustomed name of God is suddenly and, as he feels, without warrant introduced into the conversation. "I'm afraid I'm not much of a Christian."

"At least you have acted like a Christian," Madeleine told him, with a smile so winning that from that moment he swore allegiance to her in his heart. "You have saved your friend from the terrible crime of self-murder; you have given him greater chances than you

know; and," she went on with an altogether exquisite dignity, "as one who has in the past shared his life, and still feels a deep interest in it, I thank you for what you have done. Moreover, I am quite sure that God will reward you."

"Oh—er—you're very good; and I'm glad to have saved him, since you think it was the right thing to do. But there's really no—er—necessity for anything of that kind," the young man stammered confusedly, quite overcome by so unwonted a mode of address. Then, as he glanced at the card in his hand, he added: "I will certainly let you know as soon as he expresses a wish to see you again, since you don't mind coming—"

"I shall be glad to come," she said with a sincerity there was no mistaking. "Don't hesitate to let me know at any time."

A few minutes later, as Mr. Conyers closed the door of the apartment after the departure of the two ladies, he stood for a moment, with hands thrust deep into his pockets, staring blankly before him, while his thoughts found expression in the emphatic words, "Well, of all fools I've ever heard of, Raynor is undoubtedly the greatest!"

Meanwhile, as soon as they were seated in their waiting carriage, and driving again down the broad avenue toward the Arc de Triomphe, Mrs. Wynne turned to Madeleine.

"O my dear," she cried, "how thankful

I am that it was not as bad as you feared it would be!"

"I can never tell you how thankful *I* am that I did not yield to my own cowardice," Madeleine said in a low, thrilling tone. "I was near doing so. I felt, even at the last moment, as if I must turn and run away; as if it were more than I could bear to enter that room—"

"But you didn't run away!" Mrs. Wynne interrupted. "You did enter the room. There was never the least danger of your doing anything else; so don't be unjust to yourself. But tell me what you found there."

Madeleine turned and looked at her with the same expression in her eyes that had been in them when she came from the room of which they spoke.

"What did I find there?" she repeated. "In the first place, I found what I had expected—a man flung down and broken to pieces, and wild with rebellion over his fate; one who can never again live the life of self-indulgence which is the only life he has known, and whose thoughts consequently are set on self-destruction. This is what I found, in the first place. But in the second place, I found the most wonderful revelation of the power and goodness of God which I have ever known. And that is saying much; for more than once the spiritual world has seemed to come so close to me—or, rather (for I express myself very

badly), to be made so clear to me, as when a flash of lightning sometimes rends a cloud apart to give a glimpse of glory beyond its darkness—that faith was changed, as it were, into knowledge. So it has been now. In that room which I shrank from and feared to enter, such a revelation awaited me. I could not doubt, after I saw him and heard him talk, that the extension of this man's life has been granted to my prayers; and, strangely enough, it was quite clear that he has some perception of this also."

"How extraordinary!" Mrs. Wynne found herself ejaculating. "And did you tell him anything of—all this?"

"Yes, I told him in order that he might understand why his life had been spared, and that it was not his own to cast away."

"But—what is to be the end?"

"Ah" (Madeleine made the gesture of one who surrenders absolutely to higher force), "that I can not tell! I am sure only that there is a work before me to do which I dare not refuse,—which may be painful and difficult, but which is required of me, and which no one else on earth can do. How I shall do it I don't know. But no doubt that also will be made clear to me."

"No doubt," her friend echoed, and said no more.

For, indeed, there seemed nothing more to be said. Evidently something had occurred,

some revelation had been made in that room dedicated to suffering and despair, which had set Madeleine's feet more firmly than ever on the road marked out for her,—that road leading to the heights of sacrifice which only elect souls are called upon to tread; and those who loved her could only stand aside, and watch with aching hearts and wistful eyes as she mounted its rugged way. But even the most indifferent Catholic has this great advantage over those who are not Catholics: he or she has no doubt of the existence of the supernatural in human life, and recognizes it when it is encountered. So Mrs. Wynne, who was by no means an indifferent Catholic, knew the nature of the force with which she had to deal, and, wiser than Nina, made no attempt at remonstrance. Only to her husband, later, she expressed her misgivings.

"God only knows how it will end," she said. "Madeleine has been, as it appears to me, foolish enough to make the man aware of the fact that he has a new hold upon her, through her desire to save his soul. I suppose I mustn't say that I don't believe he has any soul worth saving, or which it is even possible to save—"

"No, I really don't think I would say that," Mr. Wynne observed.

"Well, anyhow, one thing is clear," Mrs. Wynne continued: "that, being what he is, he will trade upon this knowledge ruthlessly.

Already his demands have begun. He has announced that he wants to see her again, and she has promised to go back to see him whenever he sends for her."

"But if by doing these things she may perhaps save his soul," Mr. Wynne ventured to suggest, "don't you think they will be well done?"

His wife looked at him reproachfully.

"Why do you force me to say that I *don't* think so?" she asked. "I can't regard the possibility as worth the price to be paid."

"What price are you talking of? It seems to me that even the bare chance of helping the poor wretch spiritually, is worth the pain of a few visits."

"If a few visits were all! But you can't think it will end with that."

"I am afraid I am just so stupid. What else could it end with?"

"There are some things," Mrs. Wynne replied solemnly, "that one does not like to put into words. It seems to bring them more within the limit of possibilities, outside of which we would wish to keep them. If you had seen Madeleine's face when she came out of that room to-day, you would feel with me that she would not hesitate at anything. It had the exaltation which makes martyrs."

"But I don't understand what particular form of martyrdom you are anticipating for her?"

Mrs. Wynne rose hastily from her chair.

"Don't ask me to explain myself," she said. "That is the last thing I wish to do."

But to explain—that is, to express herself—was by no means the last thing which Miss Percival wished to do, when Madeleine returned and told her where she had been.

"You have gone to see him!" Nina cried. "O Madeleine, I wouldn't have believed it even of you! What conceivable claim has he upon you that you should have done such a thing?"

"I might answer that he has the claim of suffering and of piteous need," Madeleine replied. "But, if you think a moment, you will see that even this does not cover his claim upon me."

She spoke with the utmost quietness; but this very quietness had a startling effect upon Nina, for it seemed instinct with a spirit which would prove unbending as steel.

"I can't imagine what you mean," she said. "I can't conceive any claim beside that of his suffering and need which this man could have upon you."

"Nina," Madeleine remonstrated, "you know perfectly what claim, what unbreakable claim, he has upon me! 'Those whom God hath joined—'"

"Madeleine," Nina interrupted fiercely, "I think you are mad! It is impossible that, if you were sane, you could so forget your true

position toward this man! Remember all that he has done." She rehearsed the long list of brutalities and indignities, ending with: "And now he is married to another woman!"

"You mean," Madeleine answered calmly, "that the law calls the woman of whom you speak his wife; but she is not his wife. According to the law of God, a man can have but one living wife, as a woman but one living husband."

"But, good Heavens! you can't force the world to acknowledge your religious view of the matter. You are facing cold, solid, legal facts. You divorced the man for cause which amply justified the action, and he went out of your life, he married the other woman; and now you have no more to do with him, he has no more claim upon you, than any stranger you meet in the street."

"Poor Nina!" Madeleine said pityingly. "How hard you fight! And how good it is of you to care so much! But your 'cold, solid, legal facts' have nothing to do with this situation, dear heart! Here is a man who, as far as the world is concerned, is practically dead. He is flung helpless by the wayside of life. Everything for which he lived is lost to him; and, even before this terrible misfortune happened, the woman for whom he left me had left *him*. Didn't you know that?"—as Nina started. "Have you forgotten the morning in the Cathedral of Chartres, when she came

to me and told me that she was on her way to America to obtain a divorce?"

"I remember the morning you saw her," Nina answered, "and the dreadful effect her visit had upon you—"

"Do you call it a dreadful effect to have showed me in the clearest manner what happens to those who have only their own undisciplined desires and passions for guides?"

"I call it a dreadful effect which made you send away that poor young man who had crossed the world to seek you, and condemn yourself to loneliness and sadness."

"To loneliness perhaps, so far as the companionship you desire for me is concerned; but not to sadness,—never to sadness, Nina, while God gives me His faith and His sacraments."

Nina made a gesture of impatience which was not without irritation.

"I have heard all that before," she said. "I know that just now, in your *exalté* state, you find these mystical things sufficient for happiness; but you ought to have sense enough to comprehend that this will not last. No such unnatural states of feeling last—"

"Nina dear," Madeleine interrupted gently, "this is very unnecessary and—forgive me for saying—quite useless. We have gone over the matter very often, you know, and it has served no purpose. Let us not discuss it further."

"I should be only too glad never to hear

of it again," Nina replied. "But it is you who force the discussion, by your mad folly—I must call things by their right names—in trying to ignore the laws of man, whether they are the laws of God or not, and the conventionalities of society."

"You can not really think that, even if I had never been married to George Raynor, I should violate any conventionality in going to see him in his present condition?"

"If he were merely a friend or acquaintance, of course you would not," Nina rejoined. "Then you would only be performing an act of charity."

"But as it is, do you not consider him a subject for the exercise of charity?"

"For others, yes, but not for you. Because you have been married to him you can not act as others might, without exposing yourself to misconception. It is extremely undignified, to say the least, to be visiting a man who was your husband and who is now married to another woman."

"I grant that it might be undignified—though, if there were need to go, I should not think of dignity—if the woman were with him; but, as I have told you, she has left him. In this his hour of desperate need he is alone in the world—for you know he has no near relations—except for me. And on me he has a claim for help and service, which, God helping me, I will never forget or disregard."

There was no mistaking the resolution behind these words any more than the light which came into the eyes,—that light of supreme exaltation which had startled Mrs. Wynne, and which was the reflection of some inward vision of things too high for speech.

Nina gasped a little as she looked at her, catching, with the keen artistic instinct, all that her expression meant.

"Madeleine," she said, "you are surely made of the material of which heroes and saints are fashioned, but I never realized before how unfortunate it is to be made of this material. To the most of us, selfish motives appeal irresistibly; but to you they do not appeal at all, and so you are ready for any heroic folly."

"Do you call it heroic folly to answer a plain call of duty, to fulfil obligations which I voluntarily took upon myself, to acknowledge a bond ratified by God?"

"Oh, I do!—I do!" Nina wailed. "But I see that there is nothing to be gained by arguing further. Your point of view is fixed. Only tell me this: what did the man want with you?"

"His object in sending for me was to ask me to attend to some matters for him at home. He said that he had no one else of whom to ask this, and he believed that I would be willing to undertake the fulfilment of his wishes."

"And of course you told him that you would! How like *him*, and how like *you!* He is expecting to die, then?" (This rather hopefully.)

"He was expecting to make death certain by killing himself," Madeleine answered gravely.

"Oh!" Nina's eyes expanded widely as she gazed at her. "And what did you say to that?"

"What could I say but the obvious thing, that to escape from present suffering by such a road would be to condemn himself to an eternity of much worse suffering?"

"But he would never believe that, I know."

"In his present condition he will be more likely to believe it than if he knew nothing of what suffering is. He was good enough to say that he was surprised to find that I was struck with horror at the thought, and that I was not anxious to speed him on his way out of life."

"He might indeed have been surprised. Well, and what then?"

"Then he promised that he would take no immediate steps to 'cast off this mortal coil,' but would, as far as it lay in his power, still be there when I return."

"When you return!" Nina echoed sharply. "Is it possible that you have agreed to go back? What excuse did he offer for such a request? What else has he to say to you?"

"He has nearly all that he wished to say

in making the first request. We were talking of other matters during this visit—"

"You mean the question of his committing suicide?"

"Yes, of that, and—other things."

"Madeleine" (Nina rose, in the keenness of her anxiety, the gravity of her reproach), "you *didn't* tell him that you had become a Catholic?"

Madeleine met her friend's appealing gaze fully, with the lucent seriousness of her own gaze unchanged.

"Yes," she answered quietly, "I told him that I had become a Catholic."

Nina fell back into her chair and flung out her hands, as if, once for all, casting from her any share of responsibility in such madness.

"Then," she said in a voice of ominous calm, "the end is plain."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was not long before the summons which Madeleine was expecting, and her friends were dreading for her, came. In fact, there was no more than the interval of a single day between her visit to the apartment in the Avenue Hoche and the telephone call, when Conyers' voice, pitched in apologetic key, told her that Raynor wished to see her again.

"I've tried to induce him to wait a little before asking you to come back," the young man said; "but he's so impatient, and—er—irritable that there's no doing anything with him; and he has set his mind on seeing you again as soon as possible."

"Is his condition worse?" she asked.

"Oh, no! On the contrary, the doctors say it's getting steadily better. But he told me to tell you that you'd better come quickly, because he doesn't intend to endure his present state a minute longer than he can help. But I assure you that there's no need to inconvenience yourself on account of that threat; for I'm keeping my word, and watching him closely."

"You are very good to consider me," Madeleine told him gratefully; "but I promised

that I would go back as soon as he was able to see me again, and there is no reason for delay. At what hour shall I come?"

"He would like you to come as soon as you can."

"Does that mean immediately?"

"It means immediately, if that suits your convenience."

"It suits my convenience perfectly, and I will start at once."

Fortunately, as Madeleine could not but feel, Nina was not at home; so she was spared the protest which would have been inevitable under the circumstances,—that protest with which our friends are apt to express their disapproval of our actions, even when they know it to be unavailing. Nina would have known her protest to be absolutely unavailing; yet she could not possibly have refrained from making it, since she disapproved so strongly of all that Madeleine was doing. In her opinion, nothing wilder or more uncalled for could be conceived than the attitude of the latter toward the man whom she would have described as her "former husband." The fact that he was lying helpless, broken in body and despairing in soul, gave him, from her point of view, no more claim upon the woman who had divorced him than any other victim of unfortunate accident might have possessed. But, misplaced as she considered charitable ministrations in this case, she would

have been more inclined to be tolerant of them if she had felt any assurance that the matter would end with the ministrations in question. But, so far from this, she had been conscious from the first—from the hour when she burst in upon Madeleine at her prayers—that there was in the soul of the latter a force to be reckoned with, which argument and persuasion were alike powerless to move, and which might finally lead to a degree of self-immolation, the mere thought of which inspired Nina with an exasperation beyond her power to control.

These things being so, it was, therefore, as well that she was absent when the second call from her "former husband" came to Madeleine, and she promptly set forth to answer it. This time she drove alone to the Avenue Hoche; but, as on the occasion of her other visit, she did not fail to pause at the familiar Passionist chapel, which had become the best-loved home of her soul, to pray not only for strength to endure what was so repugnant to nature, but also to beg with passionate earnestness for light and direction, that she might be enabled to "say the right thing" to the soul which awaited her in a darkness more dreadful than its pain.

When she finally reached the apartment, she found Conyers eagerly awaiting her.

"It's awfully good of you to come so soon!" he told her as soon as they met. "Raynor's

so uncommonly impatient, even for him—and the poor beggar's impatient enough all the time—that I'm really afraid he's got something up his sleeve—that is, that he's found what he's been so anxious for—"

"You don't mean that you think he has got something with which to kill himself?" she asked quickly.

"I'm really afraid of it," the young man repeated. "I don't see how it would have been possible for him to get hold of anything of the kind; but he has a self-satisfied air, as if he had achieved something gratifying, which is—well, rather extraordinary under the circumstances, you know."

"Yes," she agreed. "I should say that such a frame of mind is so extraordinary as to demand explanation. Have you asked for one?"

"Yes, I have; and he replied: 'Never you mind what I've got in my head. It doesn't concern you. Just see that you get Mrs. Raynor to come to me as soon as possible. I've some matters to settle with *her*.' Now, he told me, before I asked you to come the first time, that he wanted to see you in order to beg you to attend to some things at home for him after he was dead; so there seems only one conclusion to be drawn from his impatience at present—or at least that's how it has struck me,—and I thought I'd better tell you. Perhaps you'll be able to find out what is in his mind."

"It's possible that he may tell me," Madeleine said quietly, though she had grown very pale; "and if so, I need hardly say that I will do all I can to—prevent what we fear. Now may I go in to him?"

It was the same partially darkened chamber into which she had been introduced before, with the antiseptic odors which every sick room has now, and the white-draped bed, where the shattered figure of what had been a powerful man lay motionless. He turned his head as the door opened, and said something to the nurse beside him, who rose at once, and, with an inclination full of French grace toward the entering visitor, left the room by another door. Conyers had already closed the door behind Madeleine; and so again she found herself alone with the man who had wrought such havoc in her life, but whom fate—or was it merely fate?—had once more thrust into that life.

Again, as she approached the bed, his eyes gazed up at her out of the hollow face, from the low pillow on which he lay; but there was in them a light of something like eagerness which had not been there before; and, with an apparently involuntary impulse, he put out his hand. She could not refuse to lay her own in it; and yet the action, slight though it was, recalled so vividly the last time their hands had met that the memory of all that lay between that time and this rushed over her

with sickening force. Rallying, however, her powers of endurance, she sat down in the nurse's vacated chair, and said gently:

"I am glad to hear that you are better."

"I suppose Conyers has told you that those fools of doctors say so," he answered. "They call it being better that I'm not going to die offhand, but that there seems to be a prospect of my living indefinitely in my present condition. Well, you know whether or not I consider *that* as a thing to be grateful for."

"I know that you do not," she said; "but, nevertheless, it may be. We are often very blind with regard to the things for which we should be grateful."

"There isn't a doubt of that," he said, as if some new light had dawned upon him on this point; "but you'd find it hard to convince me that there's any matter for gratitude in being left to lie here, like a useless log, instead of getting quickly out of a world where there's nothing left for me."

"You are mistaken," she assured him. "There is very much still left for you."

"In the name of God, what?" he demanded with angry impatience.

"If I told you all that there is, I'm afraid you would hardly believe me," she replied; "so I will only mention one thing. You have time left you,—time which has been called 'the purchase money of eternity,' and with which even now you may attain great things."

"What kind of great things?"

"The strength which comes from enduring that which is painful and hard with courage and patience, to mention only one of the most obvious. I am afraid it is an unfamiliar idea to you; but really the only things which matter are the things which relate to our spiritual growth, to the forming of character and the perfecting of the soul. Up to this time you have lived only on the material side of your life; but now God is giving you an opportunity to do something for the development of your spiritual nature, and for the expiation of your sins."

Mr. Raynor could be heard swearing softly to himself, as he lay staring at her much as he had done on the occasion of her former visit, but with more curiosity, though perhaps with less wonder.

"All this is a most extraordinary way of talking—or it seems so to me," he said. "You are quite right about such ideas being unfamiliar to me. They're as unfamiliar as anything possibly could be; and as for the spiritual side of my nature, I take leave to doubt that I've got one. The material side has been good enough for me up to this time. But now there's no material side left, except for damnable suffering—"

"Exactly. And that being so, why not pay a little attention to the other side, and derive some profit from suffering which you can not escape?"

"I'll show you whether or not I can escape it!" he declared, with a flash of defiance in his eyes and tone. "Just wait a bit and see."

"I shall never see what you are threatening," she said calmly, though her inward feelings belied her outward confidence. "I am sure of that."

"Why are you sure?"

"I told you when I saw you before. I am sure because I do not believe that God spared your life, in answer to my prayers, to allow you to throw it away in such a manner."

"You speak as if you had no doubt whatever of my life having been spared (that's your word, not mine: *I* should describe it otherwise) in answer to your prayers."

"Have *you* any doubt of it?" she challenged boldly.

He did not answer at once; and, looking at him, she was struck with surprise. For a moment he seemed to have forgotten her presence. His sombre eyes gazed straight before him, as if seeing or recalling some vision of the mind, not visible to material sight, which was not without power to awe the defiant spirit. Then, as he turned his gaze back to her, she caught a strange expression in his eyes, as if something heretofore unknown looked at her.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "It's all very vague and confused—what I remember of the time just after the accident. Of course

of what happened immediately after the car went over, I remember nothing: all that is completely blotted out. But later—I couldn't say how much later—I came back to consciousness,—if you call it consciousness just to know that I was alive, but to be unable to give any sign of life. And what I chiefly roused to was a sense of being on the verge of falling into a great, black, formless void—as when one slips down a smooth incline with no power to help oneself,—together with a great sense of horror at my own helplessness. Then somehow—I can't tell how or why—I seemed to become conscious of you. No, it wasn't as if I saw you,—there was no impression of your presence at all; but I felt your influence, and I had a consciousness that you were exerting a strong force to hold me back from the dark gulf into which I was on the point of falling. It was an experience that I don't particularly like to recall. You know what a dreadful thing a nightmare can be sometimes. Well, this was worse than the worst nightmare. It was awful beyond expression—to feel that I was slipping away hopelessly, and that nothing held me back from the depths into which I was about to fall, but the strength, or influence, or whatever it was, that you were exerting. I suffered unspeakable agony in fearing that you mightn't hold out." He lifted his hand and wiped a few drops of perspiration from his brow. "It was the worst

experience I've ever known," he said; "and I can't think about it even yet without turning cold. I didn't consider then how odd it was that *you* should be acting as my support: I was only in a deadly funk lest you should let go. I don't in the least know how long the state lasted, but after a while it passed away. I felt as if I were finally drawn back to safety—and—well, that's all."

Madeleine's eyes were like stars as she gazed at him, listening to this strange testimony, from such unaccustomed lips, to the reality of a spiritual experience which on her side she could never forget.

"Thank God I didn't let go!" she said simply, remembering the long vigil of that night. "And yet, in the face of such knowledge as this, you can dare to think of casting yourself voluntarily down into the gulf you then escaped!"

He made an uneasy movement.

"Of course that was only a mental delusion, arising from my physical condition," he replied. "I had just fallen over a real precipice, you know. Oh, it's all very easily explained! But it was infernally unpleasant while it lasted."

"And is my part in it also easily explained?" she asked. "You can not say that it is. All that night I was praying for you,—praying that you might be spared long enough to repent of your sins and save your soul. And whenever I paused from sheer exhaustion, something

seemed saying to me, 'Keep on!—keep on!' And I kept on; and when morning came I felt that God had granted the extension of your life in answer to my prayers, and—and in consideration of what I offered for you. And I tell you now that you shall not cast away this life, and your soul with it, into the dark gulf from which I saved you."

He regarded her—the light shining in her eyes and illuminating her face—with a wonder which was again beyond his powers of expression.

"I'll be shot, if this isn't the most extraordinary thing!" he said. "I can't get over your *wanting* me to live, considering how my life embarrasses you—"

"It doesn't embarrass me in the least, I assure you."

"It does embarrass you, since you can't, as a Catholic, marry anybody else while I'm alive."

"I think I told you, when we spoke of this before, that I have no desire to marry anybody else."

"Well, in that case—" He paused for a minute, and appeared to hesitate. A struggle was apparently going on in his mind; for he opened his lips once or twice to speak, but closed them again without speaking. Then at last he said abruptly: "See here! I'm about to propose something which you'll think the limit of selfishness and audacity; but, since

you've put yourself in such a position that you can't use the freedom the law has given you, and since you seem to feel an interest still—the Lord only knows why—in me and my affairs, I'm inclined to ask—only it seems too damnably selfish—"

Madeleine, whose pulses were beating in her throat as if they would suffocate her, heard her voice like something which was not her own, as she said faintly:

"Never mind that. What is it you wish to ask me?"

"Why, simply whether you'll be fool enough to marry me again," he blurted out. "Brute as I've been to you, do me the justice to believe that I'd never have the audacity to ask such a thing if you were really free or even if you were like other women. I always knew you were not like them, but I never realized how unlike you are until now. When I try to fancy myself making such a proposal as I am making to you to any other woman I've ever known, I—really I can't express the impossibility of it. But something seems to tell me that the fact that I'm helpless, and never shall be anything else, that I'm miserable beyond expression, that I've a perfect devil of a temper raging within me and driving me to hurl myself out of life, will appeal to you more than if I could offer you everything that was mine when we met first."

"You are right," Madeleine told him, in

the same low voice. "It appeals to me far more."

"Then" (his manner had now an almost pathetic eagerness) "will you consider it? I suppose" (he hesitated) "that the Catholic Church holds that, in spite of the divorce and my—er—marriage with some one else, we are still married?"

"Yes, the Catholic Church teaches that marriage once validly entered into can be dissolved only by death."

"And you've held death off from dissolving this marriage! Well, you must bear the penalty of your folly. I don't want to threaten—that's cowardly,—but the only way to finish your work is to take it in hand yourself. I can't face life, if I'm to face it alone, under these circumstances. You may be sure of that."

She *was* sure of it,—sure to the very depths of her sick soul; for, even if she had not known him so well—known him as no human being can know another except in the intimacy of marriage,—it would have been quite clear from his manner and expression. There was no longer any surface defiance visible in either, but a certain grim resolution which was not to be mistaken.

"Once more," he said, glancing at her when, after a silence, she did not speak, "understand that I'm not urging this on you. Probably I'm a shameful cur to mention it

at all; but it flashed on me, when you said that the Catholic Church admitted no grounds of divorce, that perhaps you might be willing to overlook the past sufficiently to come back and take charge of things and make life bearable for me. There's nothing else could make it even that; and—er—you know perhaps that the way is clear. I mean that the woman who held your place in the eyes of the world, has obtained a divorce from me. It's pretty bad," he added cynically, "to offer you a place that has been so deeply smirched, but you see I've no power now to offer you anything better; and, after all, *it's yours*."

"Yes, it is mine," Madeleine said calmly. The pulses had by this time ceased beating suffocatingly in her throat, and strength "which equalled her desire" had come to her. With a gaze as gentle as it was grave, she met the eyes wistfully regarding her. "It is certainly mine," she repeated; "but I can not tell you now whether or not I will take it again. You must give me a little time for consideration, and—for other things."

"If that means to consult your friends, I can tell you what they will say."

"It does not mean to consult any friends of whom you are thinking. It means that I must seek direction where I sought help for you in your extremity. This is all I can say to you. And now it will be best that I should go."

As she rose from her seat, he put out his hand appealingly.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked. "When will you come back? You can't think worse of me than I think of myself to have asked such a sacrifice of you, but it means everything for me."

Then she answered him with a strange saying.

"Because it is a sacrifice, perhaps it means everything for me, too," she said.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Madeleine rose at last from her knees in the quiet church of the Passionists, she was conscious of feeling slightly giddy, as if from prolonged physical strain; and indeed she had been kneeling motionless, absorbed in thought and prayer, much longer than she knew. But she was able after a moment to walk slowly out of the church into the house adjoining, where she rang a bell and asked for Father Isidore.

Into the small, bare reception room, which she knew so well, the tall, ascetic-looking priest presently came to her, and smiled when he saw who it was that awaited him; for he had been deeply impressed by this convert, whom he had instructed and prepared for her reception into the Church, and of whom he had not hesitated to declare that he expected extraordinary things.

"Ah, Mrs. Raynor!" he said cordially. "It is some time since I have seen you. I hope that all goes well with you."

"Very far from well, Father," Madeleine answered. "It is because I am in great trouble and deep perplexity that I have come to you now."

"You could not have a better reason for coming," he told her, as he sat down opposite her. "If I can help you in any way, I shall be glad."

"If you can not help me, there is no help to be found on earth," she said a little desperately. "But I have no doubt of your power to help me in the best way possible, by showing me what it is right to do. For I have a difficult decision to make,—so difficult that I find myself incapable of making it alone."

"Sometimes it is very hard to make decisions alone," he said kindly, glancing at her pale face and shadowed eyes. "I see that you bear the signs of struggle."

"Ah, such struggle!" Involuntarily she clasped her hands tightly together, as they lay in her lap. "I feel as if I were torn in two,—as if there were no possible ground of reconciliation for the forces that oppose each other."

"And those forces?" he questioned. "What are they? I ask, because in such struggles one of two things must occur: either the ground of reconciliation is found, or else, if the opposing forces are absolutely irreconcilable, one or the other must submit to defeat. I need hardly tell you that the last is inevitable if a moral law is involved."

"But when a moral law is involved, choice is taken away from one, is it not?" she asked eagerly. "It would be a relief to be told that

in this matter I have no liberty of choice, but I doubt if you will tell me so."

"I will tell you exactly how the matter stands, in relation to the moral law, when you let me know what it is," he replied. "Would it not be best to speak frankly? I can offer no advice until I know the nature of your difficulty."

"I desire to speak frankly," she said. "I want to put the whole matter clearly before you, but—it is not easy to do. Briefly, however, it relates to my marriage. You remember, perhaps, that I have been divorced—"

"I remember very well. Don't pain yourself by going into details."

"There are some details that I must go into, just to be sure that you make no mistake. I was divorced because my husband left me for another woman; later he married her, and—she has now divorced *him*. I mention these things, because you told me that they simplified my position so far that the Church would consider my separation from him justified, and would hold me absolved from any obligation of—ever living with him again."

"Unquestionably." The priest spoke with decision of tone and manner. "His unfaithfulness gave you the right of separation, which in such cases the Church allows, and there can be no obligation on your part to live with him again."

"But suppose that he were in desperate

need—need both of body and soul—and begged me to do so. Would there be no obligation then?"

"Obligation of law—no. You would be free to refuse if you wished to do so."

Her eyes met his, full of appealing anguish.

"But there are two laws,—always two laws, Father: the lower and the higher law,—the law of the letter and the law of the spirit. Interpret the higher law for me. Is there no obligation in *that?*"

"My child" (the priest's voice was full of gentleness now), "there is no need for me to interpret that law for you. A divine voice has already interpreted it. 'If thou wouldst be perfect, . . .' Like all the divine counsels, it applies to many things. The higher way is the perfect way; but it is mostly a way of difficult sacrifice, and therefore it is counselled, not commanded. Now, once more, if you wish me to advise you, tell me exactly what the situation is in which you find yourself."

Then she told him very quietly and directly. And as the priest, who was accustomed to have human souls unfolded before him, listened to her, he said to himself that he had never known a soul with more simplicity of nature and intention. Moral subtleties, and mists arising from self-love or self-will, did not seem to obscure for an instant the clear vision which is the gift of this simplicity. Having once

grasped the essential thing—the true focus from which to regard human life, else so dark a riddle—other things opened in logical sequence before the soul which put no obstacle in the way of God's grace. For this, after all, is the essential difference in souls: those who put obstacles of many kinds in the way of that grace, and those who yield themselves to it, asking nothing better than to be moulded and fashioned anew according to the divine plan and purpose. It was with an absolute lack of self-consciousness that Madeleine exhibited a soul of the latter type, as she described all that had happened to her in the spiritual order: the intimation of coming trial which had been conveyed to her by some subtle channel of mental consciousness in Notre Dame des Victoires; the news of her husband's accident; the horror which overwhelmed her in thinking of the fate of his soul; the strong impulse to pray for him, hopeless as such petition seemed; the night of vigil and struggle, in which some influence seemed urgently bidding her keep on; and the final offer of sacrifice which she had been, as it were, impelled to make.

"For when I began, I had no thought or intention of making any offer of the kind, Father," she said to the priest, who sat looking at her with an intent gaze. "But as I went on I seemed to be drawn—I don't want to be presumptuous, but there's no other way of

expressing what I mean—deeper and deeper into the spiritual world, until I realized more clearly than I can express things which at other times we believe but hardly realize. And as I kept on praying, something at last seemed to say to me,—it was all in the inner consciousness, you understand."

The priest nodded, but did not speak; only his eyes never left her face.

"Something seemed to say to me," she repeated, "'You are asking a great deal; what are you giving?' Only that, Father; but it pierced like an arrow. '*What are you giving?*' And then I thought of the coin of sacrifice (you know I told you about that, and how it brought me into the Church), and I felt that I could not hold back anything while I asked so much. So I offered everything—my happiness, my life, myself—to obtain what I prayed for."

Her voice fell, and for a minute there was silence—one of those silences which are more eloquent than speech—in the room, subtly filled with that atmosphere of monastic calm from which the tumult of earthly passion has been eliminated. Presently the priest said quietly:

"Had you anything special in your mind—any special sacrifice—when you made this offering?"

"No," she answered. "I had nothing special, only in a general way I promised to withhold

nothing that God might ask of me. Just then, that did not seem very hard; but I never thought of—this which has been asked."

He probed a little farther.

"If you had thought of this, would you have withheld the offering?"

Her eyes were dark with pain as she faced him.

"Father, how can I say? I might not have dared to withhold it, for it seemed borne in upon me that much depended on my making it; but I might—oh, I *must* have hesitated! For this is worse than death."

He sighed, as if from compassion.

"Many things in life are worse than death," he said. "Go on, and tell me what happened after you made your offering."

"After that there came presently the sense of calm which sometimes follows a long struggle. The end appeared to have been reached; and I remember rising up exhausted, but with a strange consciousness that I had gained what I asked. No doubt all this sounds horribly presumptuous, but perhaps you will understand."

He nodded.

"I understand. You are right to speak with the utmost frankness. And then?"

"There came the next day the news that he was better; and this went on—I mean news of his improvement—for many days. Finally, we heard that he was well enough to

be brought to Paris; and then—he sent for me."

Again silence fell; but this time the priest said nothing; only his grave, compassionate gaze seemed bidding her have courage; and after a while she found her voice, and went on:

"It was like facing death to answer that summons. Ever since I left him—driven to do so by indignities of which I do not wish to speak—the mere thought of meeting him has filled me with a dread beyond my power to control. Once, when by chance I heard his voice (it was in the Cathedral of Chartres), I was almost overcome by sheer sickness of soul; and the only revulsion I ever felt against the Church was on that occasion, when I said to myself fiercely that I would never submit to a religion which declared that I was still bound to him. I am only telling you this that you may understand how hard it was to go to him. But I went. Even if I had not made the offer I have spoken of—the promise not to refuse anything demanded of me,—I could hardly have failed to go, the need which called me was so piteous. What I found was simply a wreck of the man I had known. He has been broken to pieces; he can never walk again, never know anything but suffering from the body in which he has taken such delight. It doesn't bear talking of, but perhaps you can conceive in some degree what this con-

dition must mean to a man who has never in his life known a spiritual emotion, or had a spiritual thought even suggested to him; you may imagine what wild bitterness and madness of revolt it would produce in his soul."

"I can imagine," the priest said, with an inflection which expressed much.

"Then perhaps you can also imagine what, under such conditions, he would be likely to think of doing. He had determined to kill himself as soon as he could obtain the means to do so; and he sent for me, that he might ask me to attend to some matters at home for him when he had accomplished this. I was horror-struck, though I might have anticipated something of the kind; but it seemed to me so terrible that his life should have been spared for such an awful end—incomparably more awful than if he had died immediately after the accident—that I was driven to tell him what I believed to be the truth: that his life had been spared in answer to my prayers, and that he had no right to cast it, and his soul, away in such a manner. He asked how I could know that he would cast his soul away; and I told him how I knew—that I had become a Catholic."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He was amazed, for of course he remembered how far I had been from anything of the kind in the past; and he mentioned at

once the point which made it most amazing to him."

"Which was?"

"My position as a woman divorced in the eyes of the world, and married in the eyes of the Church. He said that he was sorry for me. And I told him that there was no need to be sorry for me—on that account. Well," she hurried on, "he asked me if I would not come again to see him; and, in answer to a summons, I went to-day. Then he told me that he had been thinking of all I had said and—and, since I held myself, and the Church held me, still bound by the tie of marriage, he proposed that I should come back to him. He seemed to feel that it was a terrible thing he was suggesting. He said he would never have thought of it, if I had not told him that I felt myself still bound; but since I *did* feel so, and since his need was so great—oh, I can not go over all that he said, but you can guess what it would be! And there was the appeal of his awful condition of body and soul—more awful than I can express—" A pause once more, full of things inexpressible indeed; and then the low, pathetic voice continued: "I could not answer him. I could only beg for time, and go away. I have been praying ever since then—I don't know how long it has been,—but I have had no answer; so now I have come to you Father, that you may tell me. Am I bound to do this thing?

Is *this* the sacrifice which God demands of me?"

They were agonized questions—more agonized in the intensity of their tone than in their form of words,—and the priest hesitated for an instant before asking gently:

"What do you think yourself?"

"How can I tell?" The eyes were not less agonized than the tone, as they gazed at him. "You know it is so easy to deceive oneself,—to be mistaken in such matters."

"Not for you," he answered quietly. "You have a singular sincerity of soul. Although you feel acutely, mere emotionalism has no power over you. I have been struck by that from the first; and I tell you this in order that you may not distrust yourself unnecessarily, nor yet distrust what has been made clear to you. God sometimes deals very directly with a soul like yours. Trust Him, and do not hesitate to express what you think. Do you believe that He demands this sacrifice of you?"

"What else can I believe?" Her hands were knotted so tightly together now that the knuckles stood out white. "It seems very plain. I offered myself without reserve, and I felt that the offering was accepted. I might doubt this—I might think it was all imagination—but that *he* knew it also."

"What!" Father Isidore's calm was effectually stirred. "Do you mean that any knowledge of the kind was conveyed to *him?*"

"In a degree, yes." Then she related the strange, spiritual experience which Raynor had related to her, adding at the end: "I could not but feel that this confirmation was given in order that I might not doubt the reality of what had happened to myself. It seemed to set a seal on that, and also to lend a deeper significance to what he asked. I had given a blank pledge, which God was filling out. But, even while I felt this, it seemed more than I could bear; and, like a coward, I fled. I am a coward still, Father; for I have come to you—I know it now,—hoping that you will tell me that I look at things in an exaggerated light; that I am presumptuous in supposing that my prayers had any effect or received any answer; that my imagination produced the spiritual intimations; and that there is no obligation upon me to do the thing which is asked of me."

"You see that I was right in speaking of the sincerity of your soul," the priest told her. "You have yourself so mercilessly laid bare the underlying motive which had a share, but only a share, in bringing you here, that you have left me nothing to say—except this: that you are altogether right in thinking that there is no obligation resting upon you to do what is asked of you. This man's conduct has set you free from the demands, though not free from the tie, of marriage. He has no longer any claim upon you."

"He has the claim of his great need."

"That is a different claim. I am speaking of the letter of ecclesiastical law. He has forfeited his marital rights by flagrant misconduct; and if you restore them to him, it will be on your part a pure act of grace. Understand this distinctly. You are not compelled in any sense: you are perfectly free to give or to refuse what is asked of you."

"Ah!" She caught her breath. "But to whom would I refuse it?"

He met her eyes again with the grave, compassionate regard of his own.

"You are taken in a hard pass," he said. "I know that. It is no child's play when God lays His compelling grasp upon a human soul. Nor is it an easy path in which you are called to walk, but the blood-stained way of the cross. Only—'If thou wouldst be perfect, . . .'"

"Yes, Father." She rose to her feet, like a soldier who hears the bugle call to battle. "I understand. I see it all quite clearly now. There is but one thing to do, and I shall do it."

The priest rose also, a little startled by the suddenness of her decision.

"Do you mean that you will go back to him?" he asked.

She flung out her open hands, with the gesture of one who relinquishes everything.

"Can I mean anything else?" she asked in turn. "When God shows the path, who could dare refuse to walk in it?"

need—need both of body and soul—and begged me to do so. Would there be no obligation then?"

"Obligation of law—no. You would be free to refuse if you wished to do so."

Her eyes met his, full of appealing anguish.

"But there are two laws,—always two laws, Father: the lower and the higher law,—the law of the letter and the law of the spirit. Interpret the higher law for me. Is there no obligation in *that?*"

"My child" (the priest's voice was full of gentleness now), "there is no need for me to interpret that law for you. A divine voice has already interpreted it. 'If thou wouldst be perfect, . . .' Like all the divine counsels, it applies to many things. The higher way is the perfect way; but it is mostly a way of difficult sacrifice, and therefore it is counselled, not commanded. Now, once more, if you wish me to advise you, tell me exactly what the situation is in which you find yourself."

Then she told him very quietly and directly. And as the priest, who was accustomed to have human souls unfolded before him, listened to her, he said to himself that he had never known a soul with more simplicity of nature and intention. Moral subtleties, and mists arising from self-love or self-will, did not seem to obscure for an instant the clear vision which is the gift of this simplicity. Having once

grasped the essential thing—the true focus from which to regard human life, else so dark a riddle—other things opened in logical sequence before the soul which put no obstacle in the way of God's grace. For this, after all, is the essential difference in souls: those who put obstacles of many kinds in the way of that grace, and those who yield themselves to it, asking nothing better than to be moulded and fashioned anew according to the divine plan and purpose. It was with an absolute lack of self-consciousness that Madeleine exhibited a soul of the latter type, as she described all that had happened to her in the spiritual order: the intimation of coming trial which had been conveyed to her by some subtle channel of mental consciousness in Notre Dame des Victoires; the news of her husband's accident; the horror which overwhelmed her in thinking of the fate of his soul; the strong impulse to pray for him, hopeless as such petition seemed; the night of vigil and struggle, in which some influence seemed urgently bidding her keep on; and the final offer of sacrifice which she had been, as it were, impelled to make.

"For when I began, I had no thought or intention of making any offer of the kind, Father," she said to the priest, who sat looking at her with an intent gaze. "But as I went on I seemed to be drawn—I don't want to be presumptuous, but there's no other way of

expressing what I mean—deeper and deeper into the spiritual world, until I realized more clearly than I can express things which at other times we believe but hardly realize. And as I kept on praying, something at last seemed to say to me,—it was all in the inner consciousness, you understand."

The priest nodded, but did not speak; only his eyes never left her face.

"Something seemed to say to me," she repeated, "'You are asking a great deal; what are you giving?' Only that, Father; but it pierced like an arrow. '*What are you giving?*' And then I thought of the coin of sacrifice (you know I told you about that, and how it brought me into the Church), and I felt that I could not hold back anything while I asked so much. So I offered everything—my happiness, my life, myself—to obtain what I prayed for."

Her voice fell, and for a minute there was silence—one of those silences which are more eloquent than speech—in the room, subtly filled with that atmosphere of monastic calm from which the tumult of earthly passion has been eliminated. Presently the priest said quietly:

"Had you anything special in your mind—any special sacrifice—when you made this offering?"

"No," she answered. "I had nothing special, only in a general way I promised to withhold

nothing that God might ask of me. Just then, that did not seem very hard; but I never thought of—this which has been asked."

He probed a little farther.

"If you had thought of this, would you have withheld the offering?"

Her eyes were dark with pain as she faced him.

"Father, how can I say? I might not have dared to withhold it, for it seemed borne in upon me that much depended on my making it; but I might—oh, I *must* have hesitated! For this is worse than death."

He sighed, as if from compassion.

"Many things in life are worse than death," he said. "Go on, and tell me what happened after you made your offering."

"After that there came presently the sense of calm which sometimes follows a long struggle. The end appeared to have been reached; and I remember rising up exhausted, but with a strange consciousness that I had gained what I asked. No doubt all this sounds horribly presumptuous, but perhaps you will understand."

He nodded.

"I understand. You are right to speak with the utmost frankness. And then?"

"There came the next day the news that he was better; and this went on—I mean news of his improvement—for many days. Finally, we heard that he was well enough to

CHAPTER XXI.

THE vast expanse of the Atlantic, melting on the horizon line into the misty blue of the summer sky, and rolling its waves with rhythmic softness on the long curving shore, was outspread like a great, liquid plain, sparkling with light, and alive with exquisite movement, before the beautiful beach of Fairhaven, which, originally a fishing village, was now a seaside resort for people of exclusive tastes. The whole tone of the place, even of the two large modern hotels above the beach, was one of well-bred quiet. The cottages, though picturesque and charming, were really cottages,—not palaces, absurdly so called, and constructed with a single eye to the display of wealth; there were no week-end invasions of vulgar excursionists, and there was no equally vulgar "smart set" to make havoc of decorum and set a standard of extravagance and fast living. People in search of excitement or of opportunities for social display did not, as a rule, go to Fairhaven; or, if they went, did not remain long. They voted it dull, and speedily took flight. But to those who knew and loved the place, its greatest charm was its atmosphere of restful quiet,—the fact that its lovely

beach was not overrun by throngs of half-clad men and women, that the waves rolling in from the other side of the world could bring their wondrous message unmarred by discordant human sounds, and that the wind-swept beauty of the sea and sky might be enjoyed with some measure of the peace of soul which springs from solitude.

On this brilliant August morning the beach presented its usual picture of subdued animation. Groups of people, scattered at wide intervals, were occupied with books or work, or, in delightful idleness, simply contemplated the glittering expanse of ocean; a few bathers were in the surf; children played in the sand, as children play on the seaside the wide world over; here and there a large white or red umbrella made a spot of color, and sheltered a pair of young people absorbed in each other; an artist and his easel, or a writer and his portfolio. Overhead was a great vault of stainless sapphire; and the breeze blowing in from uncounted leagues of sea was giving white caps to the waves chasing each other up the beach.

Among the various groups forming a part of this human picture was one which, in appearance at least, had become very familiar to everybody at Fairhaven. It consisted of a man, evidently a hopeless invalid or helpless cripple (for he never left the chair in which he was rolled from his cottage to the beach),

and a lady of delicate and distinguished beauty, who always accompanied him, walking by his chair, selecting the spot where it should be placed, arranging cushions and umbrella to suit his comfort, and then sitting down beside him on the sand with a book, from which she read aloud for hours.

"I have never seen such devotion," observed one lady to another in a tone of wonder, as she watched the invariable programme carried out on this particular morning. "She not only never leaves him, but she doesn't seem even to be aware of the existence of anybody else. And yet she is so young and so pretty that she might well feel the need of some life and diversion for herself. She must have been desperately in love with him before he was injured, to remain so devoted to him now."

"It would have been rather remarkable if she were in love with him," the other lady remarked, a trifle dryly. "She had divorced him for cruelty and unfaithfulness, and everyone held her justified in doing so."

The first speaker gasped. "Then how on earth has *this* come about?"

"In a very astonishing fashion—but you've surely heard something of the story? These are the George Raynors. Doesn't the name tell you anything?"

The other shook her head, looking as much ashamed as people who love gossip usually

look when convicted of ignorance concerning the affairs of others.

"I don't know that it does," she confessed. "What is the story?"

"Oh! Well, you live in another part of the country, so it's not strange that you haven't heard it," her friend conceded indulgently; "especially as, for a wonder, it was kept out of the newspapers. But everybody in Baltimore, where they live, knows all about it—as much, that is, as any outsider can know. I've spoken of the divorce. As soon as it was granted, George Raynor, although forbidden by the decree to marry again, went into another State and married Ada Trevor, who was well known to be 'the woman in the case.' Things weren't altogether pleasant for them at home, so they went abroad; and, since Raynor is very wealthy, there was no necessity for them to return. They wandered about Europe, cutting a wide swath with their money wherever they went, until the end, that everyone who knew them expected, came. There was a final quarrel,—I say *final*, because by all reports there had been many before that—and Ada returned to America to obtain a divorce. She had no difficulty in obtaining it, and the next news we heard after this was that George Raynor had been nearly killed in an automobile race. You may remember the published accounts of the accident. There were two Frenchmen killed outright, and he

was so terribly injured that the first reports were that he couldn't possibly live. He did live, however; and then, wonderful to relate, his first wife, who happened to be in Paris, went to him, and after a while married him again. Everybody was amazed. Some people said she had never ceased to care for him—though nobody who knew how he had treated her believed *that*—while others said that her conscience carried her back to him—"

"Her conscience?"

"Yes. It seems that after the divorce she became a Roman Catholic; and, since that Church does not recognize divorce, she felt herself to be bound to him."

"How extraordinary!" The seeker after knowledge, who had absorbed these details with an air of the most intense interest, stared again at the two figures, separated by a hundred yards or so from all other groups. "And she devotes herself to him like this?"

"Like this, as you see. Her whole life is regulated by his needs. It would be astonishing, if he had been the most admirable of husbands; but when one considers what he really was—well, the thing is too amazing for words. Her friends complain of hardly being able to see her at all, she is so absorbed by her constant attendance on this man, who, they say, clings to her like a child, and can not bear her out of his sight."

"What a fortunate thing it is for him, but how far beyond his deserts!"

"Oh, further beyond his deserts than can be expressed! I often wonder if he appreciates how good fate has been to him."

"I should say how good *she* has been to him! Do you suppose her religion forced her to do this—I mean, had she no choice?"

"I have been told by Catholics that she did it of her own free will, that there was no law of the Church compelling her to return to him. They say that it was simply an act of heroic charity—to forgive all his unspeakable offences against her, to take her place again beside him in the hour of his need, and render him such care and service as all his money could not buy."

"I wish that I could know her. She must be a remarkable woman."

"She is very remarkable, and very lovely besides; but I am sorry to say that there is no hope of your knowing her. She has given up social life altogether, neither pays visits nor accepts invitations; and it is an understood thing that they come to Fairhaven because nobody intrudes upon them here. You see that even on the beach no one approaches them; their desire to be left alone is scrupulously respected."

"And have they no social life at all? I should think that *he* would feel the need of it, since I infer from what you say that he

was fond of social dissipation before his accident."

"'Fond of social dissipation' expresses very inadequately what he was," the other laughed. "He led the fastest and wildest life imaginable; but he shrinks from seeing people now, probably because all that life is as much ended for him as if he were already dead; also perhaps because of his crippled condition; and because he suffers intensely, and such suffering produces indifference toward everything and everybody."

The listener nodded sympathetically. "I can understand all that, so far as he is concerned," she said; "but it is hard on his wife."

"Very hard indeed; but you may be quite certain that she counted the cost before she took up the burden."

"The trouble is that one can never count the cost fully," the first speaker murmured. "It is always greater than one expected."

"Look at her face the next time you have an opportunity," the other replied; "and you will not think that she has found it greater than she expected,—or, if so, that it has proved beyond her strength to bear."

It was a pity that the person thus advised could not have seen Madeleine Raynor's face at the time this conversation was in progress; for she might have read there all that her friend desired but was unable to express—the serenity which springs from a mind and heart entirely at peace, the quiet strength

that comes with the resolute performance of duty, and the tranquil light of something higher than earthly happiness which shone in the soft radiance of her eyes. Those eyes were now gazing out over the limitless expanse of ocean to the far horizon, where sea and sky melted together, as time will one day melt into eternity. And in their steadfast brightness there was a hint of thoughts, of hopes, perhaps of visions, such as lift the spirit above the passing things of earth to things which are eternal and unchanging. The book from which she had been reading lay open in her lap; but a glance at the face of her listener showed her some time before that he had fallen asleep, as he often did under the influence of the sea breeze, after a night of unusual pain; so her voice gradually dropped lower and lower, in order not to waken him by sudden cessation, until it finally ceased, and she sat as silent and motionless as himself, listening to the soft music of the waves as they broke upon the beach at her feet, and drinking in all the wide beauty of the glittering scene.

Her thoughts had wandered farther even than the far horizon when a slight movement of the invalid in his chair made her turn her gaze quickly toward him. His eyes, grown so large in the wasted face that they could hardly have been recognized as the same eyes which formerly looked out of this face when

its handsome lines were overlaid by an excess of florid flesh, met hers with an irritable expression.

"Why did you stop reading?" he asked. "I closed my eyes on account of the glare, but I wasn't asleep."

"I hoped that you were," she answered. "Sleep is so good for you, and I am always pleased when my voice acts as a soporific."

"You very often think it has acted as a soporific when it hasn't," he complained. "I suppose you are glad of an excuse to stop reading—"

"You know that I am not glad of anything of the kind. I never tire of reading aloud."

"Well, you might be tired," he had the grace to admit. "I wonder how many hours a day you read to me!"

"Does it matter how many they are, if both of us like the reading?"

"Certainly *I*'ve reason to like it," he said. "It's the only thing that makes life endurable under these infernal conditions. And your reading is the only reading I can stand. When Matt Conyers tried reading to me—you remember when you had tonsilitis?—I almost flung the book at his head, and I did tell him to shut up in short order. It's rather curious how, when and where you learned to read so well," he went on. "I don't suppose you ever had much practice before this?"

"None at all," she replied. "I have to

thank you for acquiring the accomplishment—if indeed there is anything remarkable in my reading."

"It is good to know that you are able to thank me for something," he observed a little grimly.

"I have to thank you for much," she said in a tone of unmistakable sincerity.

He glanced at her quickly.

"Now what the devil do you mean by that?" he inquired with his customary brusqueness of speech.

She met his eyes with an indescribable candor and sweetness in her own.

"I mean exactly what I have said," she answered. "I have to thank you for being on the whole a fairly tractable patient; for letting me tyrannize over you without overmuch grumbling; for giving an aim and occupation to my life; and, above all, for affording me the great satisfaction of feeling that I can in any degree lessen the hardship of your fate, and make life more endurable to you. For all this, and much more besides, I am, I assure you, very grateful."

Raynor made no reply for a moment; he only sat staring out over the sea, as if he saw more than the wide expanse of sparkling water. Finally he observed in a meditative tone:

"The odd thing is that one is forced to believe it."

"Of course you are forced to believe it," Madeleine said; "and I fail to see what there is odd about that."

"Do you really fail to see what there is odd about it?" he questioned, looking at her again. "If you were not *you*—in other words, if you were any other woman I've ever known—I wouldn't believe that any more than the other. For it's almost incredible that you should be sincere in saying that you have anything to thank *me* for, since the boot is so entirely on the other leg, and it's I who owe everything to you,—all the comfort of my life; and, in fact, my life itself, as there's nothing more certain than that I should have killed myself if you hadn't taken pity on me." He paused again, and then with an evident effort went on: "I've always understood what a tremendous sacrifice you made when you joined your life with mine again; but if it's any reward to you to know that by doing so you not only saved me from despair and suicide, but that you've cheered and helped, and in every way enabled me to bear what appeared unbearable, why, I trust you *do* know it; and—and I should be a damned sight worse man than I am, if I wasn't grateful for it."

It was now Madeleine's turn to be silent; her heart indeed swelled with an emotion too deep and poignant for speech. But she laid her hand on his, with a soft pressure which

expressed more than words, before she presently said, in a voice shaken with feeling:

"I am rewarded more abundantly than I can express for anything and everything that I have done, when you speak like this, and give me the assurance that I have indeed helped you. For there is no greater privilege on earth than to render service where service is needed."

He regarded her with a curious expression on his face—an expression in which wonder and admiration were equally mixed—as he said:

"I honestly believe that you do feel so—I mean about it's being a privilege to render service where service is needed; and God knows it was never needed worse than with me."

"I think it hardly ever has been needed more," she agreed. "You suffer so much in your poor body, and—you never consider your poor soul."

"My body doesn't give me much time to consider my soul," he observed; "but perhaps you'll bring me to the consideration of it after a while. I never gave a thought to its existence till I was brought low like this, and—" he paused again for an instant—"till I've seen yours. You think that's an odd expression?" She had given him a startled look.) "One isn't supposed to be able to see a soul, but I've found out that it can be seen.

I've seen yours, time and again, looking at me out of your eyes,—sometimes when you thought I didn't know. It was mostly times when you had those beads in your hand" (he glanced at a rosary hanging at her wrist), "and I suppose you were—er—praying for me."

"I do pray for you very often," she assured him gently.

"Well, keep on!" he answered shortly. "There's no telling what the result may be in the end. Now let us have some more of that stupid book. If it hadn't been stupid, I shouldn't have dropped off to sleep."

She did not remind him that he had denied the dropping off: her tact—that most exquisite of purely human qualities—never failed in dealing with him; so, only saying apologetically, "I'm afraid it *is* rather stupid," she began again to read from the condemned volume.

And as she read, no one listening to her voice could have wondered why the man in whose ear its musical cadences were constantly sounding should have found the voice of another reader insupportable, and been tempted to throw the book, from which he read, at that well-meaning person's head. It was not only that nature had given her a beautiful organ of speech, but culture had trained it to soft and lovely modulations, and fine intelligence added a rare power of expres-

sing thought and emotion. "I'd rather hear Mrs. Raynor read a drama than go to see it played," young Conyers—the only privileged and familiar visitor of the Raynor house—declared, and not without reason. For Madeleine's reading was that of one who appreciates every subtle shade of an author's meaning; and, so appreciating, is able to interpret that meaning to others. She read always with delightful spirit, and never seemed to tire. Not only during the day, whenever Raynor was not asleep or playing cards—for card-playing was the only amusement of his old life left him,—this reading went on, but also during many hours of the night, to beguile his thoughts from pain and sleeplessness. Often the trained nurse who was his personal attendant, coming into the chamber in the morning, would find his patient asleep, and Mrs. Raynor also sleeping the sleep of utter weariness, as she still sat by the bedside with an open book in her lap.

Having in this manner brought a realization of the value of books to a man who had never before cared for them, except as a resource from *ennui* whenever no other was available, it may be asked what kind of literature was thus poured in ceaseless stream into his mind. In the beginning it was, as a rule, the literature which is written purely to amuse,—not necessarily trash, but stories of the lighter order, and preferably of adventure; then by degrees,

almost insensibly to himself, the standard of his taste was raised; he began to perceive and appreciate the literary quality, charm of style, vividness of characterization; to turn from objective to subjective fiction; and finally to realize that the soul of man—that marvellous domain in which the forces of good and evil ceaselessly fight—is the most interesting subject which art can find.

This point once reached, the door was open for the introduction of many things which it would have been useless to attempt to introduce earlier,—subjects and ideas strange and foreign to the knowledge of the person he had been before the powerful hand of God cast him down into the depths of bodily and spiritual anguish, there to learn what can be learned in no other school. It was a slow process, this learning; but here again Madeleine's tact and patience never failed. She did not try to hasten the pace, or to force any conclusion on the reluctant mind. A few gentle words now and again introduced an idea, and then left it to germinate, as a seed germinates in the dark ground. She had little doubt of the final result; for under her influence the man's nature was visibly changing and softening. All that was good in it was rousing to life, breaking through the incrustation of selfishness and worldliness which had so long overlaid every natural excellence, and struggling toward the exercise of those virtues of courage and self-

control which appeal most strongly to the virile spirit.

So gradually the character of the reading had changed. Light, amusing books were not laid aside, but more than once Raynor himself called for a deeper note.

"Don't read that now," he said to Madeleine on one occasion, when she attempted to divert his mind during a period of suffering by a story such as he had liked best. "Read something that will help me to bear this infernal pain,—something about some poor wretch fighting agony, and the devil within him, as I am."

And Madeleine had gladly obeyed; for it was what she had herself longed to do. And thus the wonderful science of spiritual growth began to be unfolded to the soul which had never before realized the need of such growth or the existence of such a science.

CHAPTER XXII.

It looked as if history were repeating itself (as history, in the lives of individuals as in the lives of nations, seems strangely prone to do) when Madeleine rose from her knees one morning after Mass in the church of Fairhaven—a small rectangular and altogether hideous edifice, infrequently served by a priest from a neighboring city—and saw a lady who was kneeling across the aisle, also rise and advance toward her. A great light of pleasure leaped into her eyes as she recognized Mrs. Wynne. Their hands met; and, as at their former meeting in the Passionist church in Paris, they walked together to the door, and on the steps outside turned and kissed each other.

"Oh, what happiness to see you again!" Madeleine exclaimed. "When did you come?"

"We reached here yesterday evening,—too late to disturb you, or at least I feared to do so," Mrs. Wynne answered. "But I inquired at once about Mass; for I knew I should find you here this morning."

"Yes, you would be quite certain to find me here, as at this hour I am free, and we do not have Mass very often on other days than

Sunday. How glad I am that we had it to-day, since it has enabled me to meet you once more in church! Do you remember our meeting in Paris?"

"Can I ever forget it?" Involuntarily Mrs. Wynne sighed. "It was the first step on the road which has led you—to the place where you now are."

"To the place appointed for me," the soft voice said. "I have never doubted *that* since I went back to it."

"You do not look unhappy," Mrs. Wynne observed, regarding her critically. "I have been almost afraid to see you, but you look altogether better than I expected."

"There is no reason why I should not look well," Madeleine said quietly. "When one is sure of being where one ought to be, when one is doing the will of God to the best of one's ability, and helping another to bear an almost insupportable burden, it would be an ungrateful soul that was not content and—yes, I am not afraid to say happy."

"It is a wonderful thing that you are able to say it," Mrs. Wynne commented in a tone which showed her own wonder.

"I know that you must think so," Madeleine answered; "for you saw the agonizing struggle which it cost me to take up the duty to which I was called. And, since you saw this, I am glad to be able to tell you now that I have nothing but thankfulness in my heart

that I did nor refuse what was asked of me."

"But it must be terrible—what you have to bear!"

"Not so terrible as you might think,—in fact, not terrible at all. But we can not talk here. I have" (she glanced at her watch) "a little time longer at my disposal. Shall we go down to the beach for half an hour? It is only a step distant from your hotel, and I want to be with you as long as possible."

"Do you mean" (dismay was clearly expressed in Mrs. Wynne's voice) "that I shall not see any more of you to-day?"

"I fear not," Madeleine replied regretfully. "It grieves me, for there is no one in the world whom I so much desire to see as yourself; and I know that you, on your part, have come to Fairhaven partly because I am here—"

"Altogether because you are here."

"Ah, how good you are!" Madeleine caught and pressed for an instant the hand nearest her, as they walked along. "That makes it doubly hard to say that I fear I shall be able to see very little of you, except in this early morning hour. After Mr. Raynor wakes, I do not leave him again until he goes to sleep at night, and that is often very late."

"Good Heavens!" Mrs. Wynne looked, as she felt, appalled. "But such constant attendance is more than you should give. It is more than is ever demanded of any nurse."

"Very likely," Madeleine replied; "but, you

see, I am not merely a nurse. I minister to more than his physical needs,—in fact, I minister to those very little, for there is a trained nurse always at hand for that purpose. But it is my work to exercise a supervision over everything; to make all things smooth for him, as far as they can be made so; to write his letters, attend to some of his business affairs; and, above all, to amuse and entertain him by reading, talking, or playing cards with him, as he desires. It is a great pleasure to know that he finds comfort in my society, that he does not want me to leave him at all. And so it has come about that I never *do* leave him for any purpose whatever, except when it is necessary to go to a late Mass on Sunday."

They had by this time reached the end of the short street upon which they were walking, and come out on the beach, almost deserted at this hour, before which the great expanse of ocean lay, heaving and sparkling in the early sunlight. The breeze that met them with its briny caress was full of invigorating freshness, and the whole wide scene was filled with the radiant glory of early summer morning. They sat down on the sand, with the waves softly rippling and washing at their feet, as Mrs. Wynne repeated a sentence from her companion's last speech.

"Finds comfort in your society!" she said. "He well may. Who wouldn't, for the matter of that? And he, of all people, has reason to

be grateful for it. But you, my dear,—where do you find comfort in such a life?"

"Do you need to ask?" Madeleine's voice was very low, as her gaze dwelt on the mysterious distance of the outspread waters,—that distance with its hint of remote, unimaginable things.

"No," Mrs. Wynne answered, "I do not need to ask where you find spiritual comfort and strength to fulfil the hard tasks you have undertaken. But we can neither deny nor ignore the fact that we are made of more than spirit; that there is a part of our nature which imperiously demands natural comfort and happiness, especially when we are young,—and you are still very young, Madeleine. I can not, therefore, but wonder how you are able to endure the entire absence of this comfort, this happiness."

Then, as Madeleine turned and looked at her, she saw that the deep, dark eyes were filled with a light which there was no mistaking,—the light which comes from the inner, sacred places of the soul.

"I have ceased even to think of anything of the kind," Madeleine said simply. "There is so much to do, and such great pleasure in doing it. To help and sustain this poor soul under the burden of his intense suffering; to know what I was permitted to save him from; and to believe that God has merciful designs upon him, which I am aiding a little to fulfil,—

what could be more fraught with consolation than these things? And then—"

She paused, looked out again over the wide, sparkling waters, to where the far horizon lay veiled in summer haze; and presently, without removing her gaze from that magical distance, went on slowly:

"I need not tell you that there is something very strange as well as very strong in the marriage bond. It is like nothing else on earth. We do not realize this at first—I suppose there are many people who never realize it at all,—but the mysterious strength of the tie exists all the same. And one feels its poignancy most when all natural satisfaction in it has been burned away, and one is brought to comprehend that the relation was created by God not only for its natural object, but to form and discipline the soul. No doubt it is the sacramental grace—that grace which the world outside the Church has forgotten—which gives it so unique a power to accomplish this work of discipline, to teach lessons of patience, tolerance, and unselfishness such as can be learned in no other relation. And when one has tried—as I did—to cast off the tie, one has but to take it up again to realize, with overpowering certainty, that *it has never been broken.*"

Again there was a pause, filled only by the soft music of the plashing waves as they gently caressed the shore; and then the soft voice, also full of music, went on:

"I felt this as soon as I went back to the place which was mine in a sense that no other place on earth could be; and I was conscious immediately of the satisfaction which comes from the acknowledgment, and fulfilment of a compelling duty. I might have been conscious of this, in a degree at least, if there had been no such need as existed for the help I could render; but of the greatness of that need, and of the help that I have been able to give, how can I speak? I can only say that I have been repaid a thousandfold for the effort which it cost me to do what was demanded of me; that I have never regretted it for a moment, but only thanked God with all my heart for the opportunity He gave me, and the grace which enabled me to embrace the opportunity."

"My dear," said Mrs. Wynne in a tone of intense feeling, "you have gone far since we parted."

Madeleine turned and met her eyes again, with the same deep light shining in her own.

"How could I not have gone far?" she asked. "I have had such wonderful consolations, such happiness in being able to render service to one who in his pain and weakness has come to seem to me like a child,—not merely any child, but *my* child: in spending and being spent for an end which justifies existence in the fullest degree; and in having a glimpse, as it were, into God's great purposes. For, ever since my return, I have felt the

ceaseless, resistless pressure of the Hand which shapes us as the potter shapes his clay. The image of the potter's wheel has been in my mind constantly—for poor George as well as for myself. We have been bound upon that wheel, shaped, turned, wrought into new shape. Ah," she broke off, "it has been a revelation for which I have no words!"

Neither had her friend. There are times indeed when words are utterly inadequate to express the things which the soul is permitted to know and feel. Ineffable peace was all about them,—breathing from sea and sky in the fresh beauty of the early day. And, with a peace deeper yet in their hearts, they sat for a little while in silence, filled as before with the musical murmur of the advancing waves. Then Madeleine glanced again at her watch.

"I have just ten minutes left," she said. "Will you tell me something about your son? I hope that he is happy."

"I think I may safely say that he is not unhappy," John Maitland's mother answered; "but more than that I could not venture to assert. Things have always gone very hard with John,—I mean that he has always taken them hard. Ever since he was a little boy, I have known that life would never be the light and easy thing to him which it is to some people. He feels intensely, though without much outward show; and he has a strong, almost terrible tenacity of feeling."

"I know." The words were breathed with a sigh soft as the summer air. "It is for him indeed a 'terrible tenacity'; but where there is such strength there is great power for good."

"If it is turned into the right channel, yes," Mrs. Wynne agreed. "But if it goes wrong—I shudder to think of the force of his determination and obstinacy then. For nothing can stop him—*nothing*—when his will is once set upon an object which he desires. I can not bear to think even yet of what would have been the result—of how hopelessly he would have cut himself off from every influence of good—if you had been a different woman. I can give you no idea of his state of mind when he set out to follow you. But no doubt you know what it was."

"Yes, I know." Madeleine spoke again very softly, while before her inward vision rose the great towers of Chartres, under the shadow of which Maitland had come to her with the passion of resolve in his eyes of which his mother spoke, and where she had found the strength to deny that passion. Once more a great thankfulness arose and overwhelmed her soul in its tide of gratitude that she had not yielded to him, and by such yielding wrought the undoing of both of them. It was like looking back along a road that skirted the verge of a precipice, over which she had passed in safety, but where a single step nearer the edge would have sent both

herself and another crashing down into the abyss below. She turned and caught Mrs. Wynne's hand, as if that abyss lay before her physical vision. "Don't be afraid!" she said quickly. "He was not saved from the danger which came so near, to fall into it again. It was a fierce temptation—a temptation in which his spirit rose up like Lucifer's and said, 'I will not obey!'—but it is over."

"I can never forget in what manner it would be over, but for you," observed his mother. "It was you who saved him; and you saved him not only from defiance of God and shipwreck of faith, but you saved also his ideal of womanhood, which, after faith, is the most elevating influence that a man can possess. I see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice whenever he speaks of you. That is not often; but now and then he lets fall a few words to me, because he knows how much I love and admire you. When I came back from abroad, and told him what you had done—how and under what circumstances you had returned to the man who was your husband—he said simply: 'It is what I should have expected of her. Don't think that I am either surprised or regretful. This act has not widened the gulf between us one whit: it only shows conclusively that I was right in feeling that she was the one woman in the world worth daring and losing all things for.' Then he added: 'I'm not realizing now for the first time

that, if I had carried my point with her, I should have lost not only the things which seemed most at stake, but I should have lost *her* as well. It was one of those cases in which to gain would be to lose, and to lose was to gain. By yielding to me, she would have lowered the high ideal of herself which is now my priceless possession, and which, with God's help, may yet make me a better man.' I tell you this," Mrs. Wynne went on after an instant's pause, "in order that you may realize that your difficult sacrifice has wrought good not only for yourself and the man whom you have saved from despair and death, but also for the man who has had the harder fate of loving and losing you."

Once more silence fell; for Madeleine's tears—tears springing from the deepest founts of feeling—were dropping in a crystal shower into her lap; and when presently she looked up at her friend, it was with an April smile of tremulous sweetness.

"Surely God is too good to me!" she said. "It is more than I deserve that you should tell me such exquisite things. From you and from *him*, they are worth more to me than I can possibly express. I have thought of him often, and prayed for him much; but I have always seen him in imagination as I saw him last—so angry with me, so unrelenting in bitterness against the power that divided us, and above all so unhappy! It was the unhappi-

ness that nearly broke my heart. I have always desired so ardently to make those whom I love happy; to add, as far as I might, to the gladness and joy of life for them, and not to darken it in any way. And there I was with the dreadful knowledge that I could not make this man happy—this man who had given me more than any one else in the world ever did—except at the cost of his final unhappiness. For I knew that you were right in your first warning to me, when you said that, though he might defy his Faith, he could never forget it, and therefore real happiness would be impossible to him. This was my sole comfort; and yet to send him away so desperately unhappy, so bitterly angry—ah, it was hard!"

"Poor child, I know that it was hard! How shameful of him to make you suffer so much!"

"I didn't mind my suffering," the eager, thrilling voice declared. "It didn't seem to matter a particle whether I was unhappy or not; but to make him so unhappy—to spoil his life, to have no power to put things right or to do him any good,—that was what was intolerable. I found myself praying to die, begging to be taken out of the world where, by one false step, I had rendered myself a curse when I would have wished to be a blessing."

"You a curse! O Madeleine, how could you have been so foolish?"

"I was not foolish," Madeleine assured her

gravely. "I should not have begged to die, perhaps; for life and death must be left in the hands of God. But I was right in believing that any woman in the position I occupied then, is a curse to society and a constant temptation to sin. If I had not realized this otherwise, your son would have taught it to me. Think what havoc I might have worked in his life! And, although I was mercifully spared from doing the worst, think what havoc I did work!"

"You worked no havoc," John Maitland's mother stoutly declared. "You have done him nothing but good. You have taught him a lesson which no one else in the world could have taught him; and given him an untarnished ideal, for which he will always bless you."

"Now as always, you are too good to me," Madeleine told her gratefully, as she rose from her lowly seat on the sand. "It has been a lovely half hour with you," she added; "but now I must go. If there is any chance of seeing you again to-day I will let you know."

"Perhaps Mr. Raynor would consent to know us," Mrs. Wynne suggested. "Tell him that we are very quiet people, but that Mr. Wynne is rather humorous sometimes; and also that he plays every game of cards that ever was invented—as I know to my cost, for we always carry a cribbage board with us, even on our journeys."

"Does he play cribbage?" Madeleine asked eagerly. "So few people do play it now, and George always says it is the only really good two-handed game. I play it with him, but I am stupid—"

"I don't for a moment believe *that*."

"Well, at all events, I shall mention Mr. Wynne in connection with the cribbage board; and there is a bare chance that he will consent to see him, though he dislikes meeting strangers. We'll hope for the best, however; so *au revoir!*"

A moment later Mrs. Wynne stood alone, watching the graceful figure as it ran lightly toward the cottage, into which it disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN Madeleine, quite incidentally, told Raynor of the arrival at Fairhaven of Mr. and Mrs. Wynne, she found it unnecessary to enter into details with regard to who they were.

"He's the chap who kept telegraphing inquiries about my condition after the smash-up in France," Raynor said as soon as the name was mentioned. "I remember all about him. His solicitude puzzled us—Conyers and myself—tremendously, until I thought of you. 'He's doing it for my wife,' I said. For it's odd," he broke off, "but I didn't think of you even then except in that way. The other woman passed out of my life like a shadow, as such women do pass out of men's lives; but you remained, like a steady star that didn't change."

"You are growing poetical," Madeleine told him.

"Haven't any intention of the kind," he replied shortly. "I'm simply stating a fact. I knew—or at least I fancied I knew—that you were no longer my wife, but nevertheless I thought of you in that way. As soon as Conyers told me about the inquiries, and the 'answers paid' to be sent in reply, I felt sure that you

were behind the matter. But, all the same, it was awfully decent of this Mr. Wynne to act for you; and I've always felt obliged to him and his wife, since it was through them we traced you."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind meeting them," Madeleine suggested. "I know that you don't care about seeing people generally—in fact, that you dislike it—"

"So much so that, as you know, I refuse absolutely to see or to be seen by anybody."

"But I really think that you would be repaid if you made an exception in favor of these people," she went on, with all the eager desire in her heart finding expression, though she was not aware of it, in her face and voice. "I wouldn't ask you to consent to meet them if I were not sure that you would like them. They are charming in every respect: so simple, well-bred, and *kind*—well, what Mr. Wynne did for me in Paris, on his own initiative entirely, will tell you how kind they are."

"And, liking them so much, you want to see something of them while they are here," he said, looking at her keenly. "That's natural enough. I'm a selfish dog to keep you pinned to my side all the time, and forget that you need some change and diversion. Make what arrangements you like to be with your friends. You know Anderson can take care of me while you are absent."

"Do you think I would leave you to Ander-

son, good nurse as he is?" she asked. "You have mistaken me altogether. It was not because I wish to be with these good friends of mine that I suggested your seeing them, but because I truly believe that you would enjoy their society."

"That's nonsense," he returned, with something of his old roughness of tone. "I couldn't enjoy the society of the most agreeable people on earth: they would only irritate me. Go and be with these friends of yours as much as you like, but don't try to drag me into seeing them."

"I had no intention of trying to drag you into doing anything unpleasant to you," Madeleine assured him earnestly. "I will not mention the matter again."

But on the next day Raynor mentioned it himself.

"Look here! This won't do!" he said abruptly, interrupting Madeleine while she was reading—something which rarely occurred. "You are not seeing anything of those friends of yours, after all."

"Oh, yes, I am!" she replied with a bright smile. "I went sailing with them this morning. We started at daylight, and I wish I could tell you how marvellously beautiful it was to watch the glory of the sunrise far out at sea, the divine loveliness of the color which flushed the sky and all the outspread waters, until one felt as if one were in the heart

of a rose. And when the sun sprang in dazzling majesty out of the ocean—there are no words to describe that miracle! Then the run in before the breeze was so delicious, so invigorating, that I could only wish, and wish again, that you were able to share the pleasure with me."

"Did you wish it?" he asked, watching her curiously. "I'd hardly believe it from anybody else, but one can't doubt *your* sincerity; and you are quite foolish enough to have spoiled your little bit of pleasure by remembering the existence of the selfish and churlish clog upon your life, who made it necessary for you to rise at daylight in order to enjoy that pleasure."

"You shall not speak so of yourself," Madeleine answered quickly. "You are neither selfish or churlish. It was by my own choice that I got up at daylight; and one couldn't well see the sunrise out at sea without making that exertion, you know."

"Well, hardly." His lips twisted into a slight, unwilling smile. "But you can't deny that the hour for the sail was selected because it was the only time you were free from my demands."

"I should not call them your demands, but your needs, which I am vain enough to think that no one else can fill as well as I can," she replied; "and even if that was the reason for the selection of the time for the sail, we

were well repaid, since no other hour could have been so beautiful."

"Nevertheless, there's no need to repeat the exertion. If you are determined that you will not see your friends at ordinary hours and times, why, then, I must make a sacrifice on my side—"

"No, no, I don't wish you to do that! There is no necessity."

"There *is* a necessity. She was familiar with the obstinate tone that came into his voice, the obstinate set of his mouth. "I'll not let my churlish selfishness—for that's what it is—stand between you and the only thing for which you've shown the least sign of desire since you bound yourself again in bondage to me. Ask Mr. and Mrs. Wynne to come here. I will receive them."

"Please don't urge me to do it!" Madeleine begged, with a look of the most genuine distress. "They understand perfectly. I have explained that you do not feel able to see any one—"

"I am thoroughly well able, so far as my wretched body is concerned,—you know that," he interrupted. "The dislike is wholly in my mind."

"Exactly, and therefore don't let us discuss the matter further. I am sorry that I ever spoke of it to you."

"There is no reason why you should be sorry. According to your theory and practice—for you are one person whose theory and

practice absolutely agree,—there's something to be gained by occasionally sacrificing one's own inclination for the sake, or for the benefit, of somebody else. It's not a practice to which I have been at all accustomed up to this time; but I suppose it is never too late to begin."

"You mustn't begin—you really *mustn't* by doing a thing so disagreeable to yourself on my account."

"On whose account would you have me do it? Do I owe anything to any other soul on the face of God's earth? And do you want all the sacrificing to be on your side? I call that damned selfishness! Don't say another word, but go yonder" (he pointed to her open desk) "and write a note, asking those people to come and see us. Perhaps we might have them to dinner this evening."

"I'm afraid you are not strong enough for that."

"Oh, I am strong enough! The infernal pain is not so bad as usual to-day. And, if they play cards, we might have a game of bridge after dinner. I think I'd rather like that. We haven't had any bridge since Conyers was with us last. Do they play?"

"I fancy there's no doubt of it. Mrs. Wynne told me that her husband plays every game of cards that ever was invented, and that he is so devoted to cribbage that they carry a cribbage board with them on all their journeys."

"Oh, by Jove!" Mr. Raynor's face assumed

an expression of distinct pleasure. "If he's that kind of person, virtue may possibly be its own reward. I'll try a game of cribbage with him to-morrow, but say bridge for to-night."

Madeleine said bridge; and, the reply being satisfactory, and the result still more so, virtue did indeed seem in a fair way to become its own reward. For, strangely enough, Raynor liked the Wynnes at once, and found himself not only able to tolerate their society but even to enjoy it, especially that of Mr. Wynne. As the stay of the visitors was prolonged—they had come to Fairhaven expecting to remain only a few days, but ended by remaining several weeks,—the two men developed a liking for each other which no doubt surprised both. They spent hours together in contented comradeship, thus leaving Madeleine free to enjoy the companionship of Mrs. Wynne. It appeared to the former an almost incredible good fortune to have this unrestrained intercourse with the friend who, of all people on earth, understood her best, and with whom sympathy was deepest and most perfect; and she expressed her gratitude with touching fervor.

"It seems almost too good to be true, that I am able to have the happiness of being with you in this manner, without any reproach of conscience for duty neglected," she said. "For the present at least, I think George really prefers Mr. Wynne's society to mine, and it

is the greatest pleasure to see them together."

Mrs. Wynne smiled as she glanced toward the end of the veranda where the two figures were seated, between them a small table bearing a cribbage board, and certain tall glasses, in which the straws indicated liquid refreshment.

"They do get on wonderfully well, considering how different they are in character, and how different their lives have been," she observed. "Of course compassion was the first thing which drew Richard to Mr. Raynor, but now he really likes him. 'It's a pity that young man was spoiled in the making,' he said the other day,—'spoiled by too much prosperity, and by the utter lack of any influence to stiffen him against the overwhelming temptations which beset those who inherit wealth, without any sense of responsibility.' Then he added: 'He's been uncommonly lucky in this misfortune which has befallen him.'"

"Meaning by that—?"

"Meaning, as he proceeded to explain, that God has taken a great deal of trouble with him in breaking him to pieces in every sense, as He has done,—all of which implied that there was good in him that could be brought out only by such treatment."

"It is being brought out, slowly but most wonderfully," Madeleine said. "I can give you no idea how much he has changed within the last year. At first he was so wildly im-

patient, so bitterly rebellious, so filled with rage, the more fierce for being impotent, that life with him would have been almost unbearable, if the pity he inspired had not been so great; and, with the pity, the passionate desire to help such desperate need. But it was as I told you the other day. Bound on the wheel by suffering,—the Hand which does the potter's work upon us has never ceased to shape and mould him into new form. It is marvellous to watch such a process going on before one's eyes,—such a transformation wrought by divine grace in a human soul. For it is impossible to doubt that it has been wrought by divine grace; there is nothing else powerful enough to work such a miracle."

"'O ye of little faith!'" Mrs. Wynne murmured, as she sat gazing at the face before her. "How often we deserve that reproach! And I have never deserved it more than in this matter. I could not be reconciled to the step you took in Paris, and I have never been reconciled to it until now. But now I see that this is the end for which you were in training all the time; and it is awful to think how easily you might have frustrated the designs of God for you—and for him."

"Very easily," Madeleine assented. "That is the deep and terrible mystery of free-will, that we *can* frustrate the designs of God. I could have refused what was asked of me; I was assured again and again, by those who

had the right to assure, that I was free to refuse; but what a tragedy of the soul it would have been had I done so!" She paused, and looked out through the vine-hung arch of the veranda to the wide, shimmering expanse of sea, across which at this moment a stately ship passed, forming a perfect picture, before she added meditatively: "I have shuddered sometimes in thinking how near I seemed to come to refusing; yet I do not believe that I was ever really near it at all; and, so far as I can judge, I obtained the strength to do what was required of me through having made the other renunciation, which was also demanded. Are we not told that we gain strength in conflict,—the power to make sacrifices by making them? And since it is written of Our Lord Himself that He 'learned obedience by the things which He suffered,' it seems quite clear that there is no other way for us to learn this obedience than by the things we suffer."

"Those are happy who learn it as you have done," Mrs. Wynne said. "But that poor soul yonder! How far has the process gone with him?"

"I don't know," Madeleine answered simply. "I have always felt that there is something sacred about the privacy of the soul, and therefore I have asked no questions. Now and then I have ventured to talk to him of matters of faith, always taking care not to fall into preaching; and he has generally listened with

more interest than I could have expected, knowing as I do how remote from his interest such subjects have always been. For the rest, I think God is teaching him by the things he is suffering, and in that teaching I have no need to interfere." Again she paused for a moment, and then added softly: "Mr. Wynne is right: he has indeed been broken to pieces, in the inner as in the outer man, since only by such means could anything good in him have been brought forth.

> How else may man make straight his plan
> And cleanse his soul from sin?
> How else but through a broken heart
> May Lord Christ enter in?"

Mrs. Wynne caught her breath, with what the French call a *serrement du cœur;* for it was not only the pathos of the voice repeating these lines—which are among the most poignantly pathetic ever written—that touched her deeply; she seemed at this moment to have a glimpse into the far-reaching purposes of God in His dealings with the souls He has created. A sudden conviction was borne to her that here, in silence and pain, in suffering of body and anguish of mind, had been enacted, and was still enacting, one of the spiritual dramas which the angels themselves must regard with awe. Here were two souls, brought together in the mystical bond which is formed "for better, for worse," acting and reacting on each other; led by strange paths and

unknown ways toward the goal appointed for each, and which each would undoubtedly have missed had he or she followed different paths. On one side the following had been an act of choice; on the other, compulsion of a kind had been exerted, yet compulsion which left a final liberty of choice. It was all very marvellous, and most marvellous perhaps was the realization which came to her of the nature and extent of the result flowing from Madeleine's decision when she took up the burden of the tortured body and despairing soul of the man who had forfeited all claim to such care from her. A part of this result was clearly perceptible in the change so wonderfully wrought in him; but something told Mrs. Wynne that what was to be seen was only the smaller part of the result. The greater part, she knew instinctively, was visible to the eye of God alone; and it was not confined to the soul of George Raynor. Other souls shared in it (she thought of her own son); and she had, above all, an assurance that the greatest result was to be found in the soul of Madeleine herself. She caught her breath again.

"I wonder—" she said, and then paused.

Madeleine glanced at her inquiringly.

"What do you wonder?" she asked.

"I wonder how it will all end for you?" Mrs. Wynne replied, speaking her thought aloud.

The other made a slight gesture of indifference.

"That is a question I never ask," she said. "It does not seem to matter at all. The end, whatever it may be, is safe with Him who makes no mistakes. If we are quite sure we are doing His will, that we are in the place where He desires us to be, we need take no thought beyond the work of the day. That work satisfies me entirely."

And so sincere was the accent of these words, so final, as it were, the tone with which they were uttered, that Mrs. Wynne, even had she desired to do so, could not have pressed inquiry or conjecture further.

It was not very long after this conversation that the stay of the Wynnes at Fairhaven finally drew to an end; and Madeleine, saying good-bye to these friends whose visit had been so great a pleasure to her, saw them go back to their happy, useful life in a world from which she was utterly cut off. It would have been no more than natural if she had missed them intensely, and felt that sense of flatness and emptiness which often follows the withdrawal of a companionship in which mind and heart have alike taken delight. But, as a matter of fact, she was not conscious of this—which rather surprised her, and might have told her, in Mrs. Wynne's phrase, how far she had gone on a difficult road. It was Raynor who presently remarked, after he had watched her

keenly for signs of sadness and failed to find them:

"One might almost think that you didn't miss your friends at all."

"Yes, I miss them," she answered frankly, "but not in any painful degree. To have seen them so freely was a great happiness,—a happiness which I owe to you. But, now that they are gone, I am glad to take up the usual routine of our life—only I am afraid that you will miss Mr. Wynne."

"I miss nobody when I have you," he said, with the abruptness which with him always characterized any utterance of this kind. "Mr. Wynne served as a tolerable substitute for you; and I was glad of that, since it set your mind at rest about me, and enabled you to enjoy the society of his wife. But you are the only person who never wearies me."

"Did *he* weary you? I thought you liked him."

"I do like him; I couldn't have imagined that I would ever like a man of his kind so much. My associates have always been of a very different order, you know." He mused a little. "It's odd," he said then, "but there is a quality in him that seemed to appeal to something in me of which I hadn't before suspected the existence. I don't know how to describe it—I'm not much at psychological analysis,—but it was as if there were capabilities in my nature which had never stirred

until they lifted up their heads when this man talked of the ends and aims of his life,—of his existence so full of worthy achievement, of clean, honest work, and the satisfaction it brought. As I listened to him—and he wasn't drawing any moral, either,—I couldn't but think of the contrast with my life, and its ends and aims; and I had a sense of positive nausea in remembering how I had spent the years which are past. And the capabilities of which I've spoken rose up and looked at me like ghosts. 'You murdered us,' they seemed to say, 'when you made pleasure and self-gratification the only objects of your existence; and now it is too late to do anything.' I suppose" (he gave a short, forced laugh) "you'll think that I am a fool to talk like this, when it is all so useless now; but—it was rather ghastly. I had so clear a conviction that I, too, might have done things worth doing if my feet had been set in the right path at the beginning. Understand: I'm not blaming anybody but myself. Yet it is true that I had in me the making of a decent man; and I've been—well, you know what I've been."

"I know that what you have been is of small importance to what you may be," Madeleine answered gently. "Of course it is out of your power to change certain things. The consequences of our actions pass out of our hands, and flow on forever. But we can always change ourselves, and that is all that God

asks of us. You haven't forgotten, I'm sure, the lovely story of the prodigal son? It is quite clear that Our Lord told that parable in order that no one might ever despair, no matter how far he had wandered, how low the depths into which he had fallen."

"I don't remember very much about the prodigal. He wasted his substance in riotous living, and came to feed with the swine, didn't he? God knows that is all true of me,—the riotous living and the feeding with swine. Suppose you read the story, and then I'll ask a question or two about what one who has fed on husks must do to find better food."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a year later—a year since that visit to Fairhaven which the Wynnes were talking of repeating—that Mrs. Wynne, seated at her pleasant breakfast table, with all the beauty and fragrance of summer coming in through the open windows of the room, unfolded the morning paper, and almost immediately uttered an exclamation. Her husband and son both glanced at her inquiringly.

"It's about Mr. Raynor," she said, in answer to the glances. "He is dead!"

"Is it possible?" It was Mr. Wynne who spoke, with the surprise which, curiously enough, this most common of human events rarely fails to excite. "Mrs. Raynor has not said anything in her letters lately about his being worse, has she?"

"On the contrary, she has written of his being better,—that is, suffering less pain. They were to have gone to Fairhaven next week. His death must have occurred very unexpectedly."

"What does the paper say about it?"

"Oh, it says" (Mrs. Wynne looked down at the page before her) "that he died quite suddenly. The notice is headed, 'Death of Millionaire Sportsman!' (Was there ever any-

thing like the vulgar snobbery of the American press when it has occasion to allude to the life or death of a rich man?) Then it goes on to give a sketch of his antecedents, socially and financially; to recall the account of the automobile accident in France; to relate how extraordinary his survival of his injuries was considered; and of how he was brought home, and has apparently continued to improve, until recently something in the shattered frame gave way, the heart failed, and the end came quickly."

"Is that all? Is there nothing about any other—er—facts in his life?"

"Nothing. For once the reporter has held his hand. There is no mention of divorces or—of marriages. But this is significant: 'At Mr. Raynor's bedside when the end came were his wife (formerly the beautiful Miss Madeleine Layton) and Father Vincent, of St. Aloysius' Church.'"

"Yes, that tells everything," Mr. Wynne agreed. "The poor fellow—God rest his soul!—didn't go forth 'unhousell'd,' disappointed, unanel'd; but the great mother of us all stood by, to help him with her Sacraments on his last journey."

"And so Madeleine's hard task is ended!" Mrs. Wynne said, dropping the paper. "What a wonderful story it has been! And how deeply thankful she must feel for all that she has been permitted to do!"

"Yes," Mr. Wynne assented again. "We may be sure that her heart has but one cry, and that is, *Deo gratias!*"

A slight sound at this moment made them both glance toward John Maitland. He had pushed back his chair from the table; and, with a brief, "You'll excuse me, mother?" he now rose and left the room.

His mother's gaze followed him with a very wistful expression until he passed out of her sight. Then she turned her eyes back to her husband.

"Oh, I do wonder what this will mean for him?" she breathed, with a soft sigh.

Mr. Wynne smiled slightly.

"I think that you hope more than you wonder," he said.

"I do," she confessed. "How could I not hope that now, when the way is at last clear, those two, who have suffered so much apart, may at last be happy together? It would be such a perfect end."

"Would it?"

Mr. Wynne spoke meditatively; and having spoken, was silent for a moment. "It's strange," he then remarked, as if to himself: "in some things—in fact, in most things—your spiritual perceptions are much keener than mine; yet now and again you surprise me by a singular obtuseness with regard to something which is quite clear to me."

Mrs. Wynne leaned back in her chair, and

looked at him with an expression in which apprehension and defiance were curiously mingled.

"What is amiss with my perceptions at present?" she inquired. "How am I exhibiting obtuseness? Why shouldn't I hope that Madeleine may not be rewarded for all her heroic sacrifices by being made happy at last?"

"There's no reason whatever why you shouldn't hope for it," Mr. Wynne replied. "Only—well, it's all a matter of perception; and if you don't perceive that there might be such a thing as descending from a higher to a lower plane, there's no good in attempting to demonstrate the point to you."

"Don't be so insufferably didactic and superior!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Explain what you mean—or no, you needn't explain! I understand what you are implying, and I don't agree with you in the least. After all, I may be supposed to know more about Madeleine than you do."

"There is not a doubt of that," Mr. Wynne replied promptly. "You certainly know much more about Mrs. Raynor than I do; but I believe that your feeling for her is so strong that it blinds your judgment, so far as she is concerned."

"You can't believe that I think too highly of her? That is what such a phrase usually means."

"On the contrary, I believe that, in some respects, your intuitions with regard to her don't aim high enough; for instance, in the kind of happiness you are planning, or dreaming of for her—"

"Richard, you are really *very* disagreeable!"

"My dear, I won't say another word." He rose, walked around the table, laid his hand on her shoulder, and, bending down, kissed her cheek. "Forget what I've already said. I was only expressing the impressions of a dull man, you know."

"That's the worst of it," she complained: "you are not a dull man!"

"I really am," he assured her. "And in this matter I'm possibly altogether mistaken. For your sake I hope so, since you have set your heart on having Mrs. Raynor for a daughter."

"I've set my heart still more on seeing her happy."

"Yes, I know." He gave an affectionate pressure to the shoulder on which his hand still rested. "I believe you'll be gratified in seeing that, only you must trust the manner of it to the Higher Powers."

Then, as if to avoid further discussion, he went away rather hastily; while Mrs. Wynne, looking at her son's vacant place, said to herself passionately:

"It will be in *that* way,—I'm sure it will e in that way!"

It was several days later when Mrs. Wynne received a letter from Madeleine, in answer to that which she had written immediately after reading the news of Raynor's death.

"Yes, he has gone," Madeleine wrote—"gone in a fashion so marvellous that even yet I find myself lost in wonder over it,—over the depth of the miracle which the grace of God can work in a human soul. I have told you something of the transformation which has been going on in his soul: the gradual apprehension of spiritual things, the practice of spiritual virtues,—the hard virtues of patience under suffering, of resignation, and at last even of willing acceptance of this suffering. 'For I've got so much to expiate!' he said again and again, after he had once grasped the idea of the possibility of expiation. Finally, the change in him became so great that it filled me with nothing less than awe; for it seemed to bring one so close to the supernatural. It was as if one *saw* God making him over before one's eyes. His patience grew almost heart-breaking to witness—if you can understand what I mean by this,—and I might have known that when things reached such a point the end was at hand. It came at last very suddenly, but not so suddenly that he had not time for all that was necessary,—time to receive the Sacraments with a conscious mind and great contrition of spirit, and to say some words to me which I can not repeat

even to you, but which I shall carry written on my heart until I die, and I think beyond death.

"There was no pain or struggle at the last, only a sense of infinite consolation,—of something divine upholding the spirit. And when I heard the priest's voice rise in the solemn 'Go forth, Christian soul!' I could only think of the other going forth which had been so near,—of the dark gulf into which he had then felt himself slipping. *He* remembered it, too; for he looked at me, and, with the last flash of consciousness, whispered: 'This is different.' Then, as I touched the crucifix to his lips he passed away.

"Do you wonder that my heart is so full of thankfulness that I have not yet been able to realize the great emptiness which awaits me,—the sense of an occupation gone; of hours which I can no longer fill with acts of service; the loss of one whom I had grown to love again in a different and tenderer fashion than of old, and who depended upon me for everything as a child depends upon its mother? I know that this realization of emptiness and loneliness awaits me: I feel it in the background, as it were. But now I can only repeat with unspeakable joy and gratitude: 'Thank God! thank God!' and yet again 'Thank God!'"

At this point Mrs. Wynne dropped the letter into her lap, and sat gazing before her with eyes in which a shadow of doubt seemed

struggling with sympathetic joy. Her husband's words recurred to her memory: "There might be such a thing as descending from a higher to a lower plane." After this intense spiritual experience, this taste of absolute ecstasy, would the happiness which she so ardently desired for Madeleine be indeed a descent to a lower plane of feeling? She repudiated the thought, yet could not banish it; although assuring herself that it would be better for her to come down from such heights of emotion to the normal happiness, the ordinary ways of life, to the sweetness which dwells in love, to the satisfaction to be found in duty untouched by the mystical note of sacrifice. For her husband was so far right in saying that Mrs. Wynne's spiritual perceptions were sometimes obscured by her feelings, that at this moment she shrank from the thought of that note of sacrifice, which she knew—what Catholic does not know?—exercises a positive, and frequently irresistible, fascination over certain souls. She remembered that she had first brought it to Madeleine's knowledge—first suggested the idea which the latter had so eagerly grasped, so promptly acted upon,—and thus opened to her the road on which she had since gone so far. Wonderful things had been wrought through the application of that idea; of this no one was more thoroughly aware than Mrs. Wynne herself, and no one appreciated those things more. But, had she uttered her inmost

feeling, it would have been to the effect that the work had been accomplished, the end of heroic self-immolation achieved; and now—*now* came the time for reward; for peace and natural happiness, instead of pain and spiritual ecstasy; for smiling valleys rather than rugged heights.

"It must be so!—it must all come right at last!" she again assured herself; and then lifting the letter, finished reading it. There was not a great deal more. Madeleine had added only a few words about herself.

"I am now, for the first time, feeling the result of the physical strain under which I have been for so long," she wrote. "My strength never failed while I needed it—what cause for gratitude there is in this!—but, now that the need is over, it seems suddenly to have given way, and I am told that I must take a long and complete rest. I am, therefore, sailing next week for France, where I shall join my dear Nina, and go with her to a remote place in Switzerland, where I can be perfectly quiet, recover my strength, and question my soul."

"What does she want to question her soul about?" John Maitland asked, looking up at his mother, when, a little later, he read this.

"I don't know," Mrs. Wynne replied. "It is probably merely an expression, signifying that she is in doubt what to do with her life, now that the occupation which has of late so completely filled it is taken away. There are

times in the lives of all of us, you know, when we seem to come to a full stop, to the end of a familiar order of things, and when we have to find a way to pull ourselves together, and go on."

Maitland frowned a little.

"That hardly seems applicable to her," he said.

"I think that it is entirely applicable," Mrs. Wynne answered. "Don't forget that this is the first time she has ever felt herself really free; and it is not strange, therefore, that she should want to consider what use to make of her freedom."

The young man's steel-gray eyes seemed suddenly to blaze in his face, as he looked at his mother.

"I can not understand how you can speak in this way," he said vehemently, "when you know how I feel toward her, and how she has felt toward me. In my mind, there is no question of what use she can make of her freedom."

Mrs. Wynne leaned forward and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Dear boy," she said, "there may be no question in your mind, but you can't tell what question there may be in hers. Try not to be too certain that the answer will be what you desire."

"Why do you say this?" he demanded quickly. "Do you know—anything?"

"Nothing," she hastened to assure him,—"nothing at all. But because I am anxious—anxious for your happiness and hers—I can not help fearing when I see you so confident."

"Why shouldn't I be confident?" he demanded again. "I haven't changed since we parted, and why should I think that she has? It wouldn't be like her to change. And if she hasn't, now that the obstacle which stood between us is removed, do you think I will let anything else keep us apart?"

"I'm sure that you will not, if you can prevent it."

"I shall undoubtedly prevent it." His voice expressed inflexible resolve. "See here, mother! Don't you understand why I seem to you no doubt very presumptuous? It isn't really presumption so much as the determination that she shall have the happiness which is due her if I can give it to her. It was *that* more than anything else which made me act as I did before,—I mean the intense desire to make her as happy as she deserved to be, and never had been. You'll say that, instead of accomplishing this, I achieved only the end of making her more unhappy. But do you know I'm not altogether sure of that? I've had time to think of this thing from a great many points of view—and you would hardly believe how many points of view it has."

"Oh, yes, I would!" Mrs. Wynne said. "I have been able to see a great number of them

myself. And yet, John, you must remember that, when it comes to judging your conduct, there is only one point of view possible."

"That I was wrong, indefensibly wrong? Of course I admit that," he replied frankly. "I've never tried to defend my conduct, and for a time it seemed to me that I had made the most awful botch of things conceivable. I had" (he checked the items off on his fingers) "defied the Church, and been ready to give up my Faith, or at least the practice of it, for the sake of marrying a divorced woman; I had nearly broken your heart; I had made her miserable instead of happy; and, last and worst of all, I had tried to keep her from entering the Church. That's a pretty black list; and, after the full realization of it all came to me, I almost wonder that I didn't cut my throat. You know how savagely wretched I was after I came home? Well, what I showed was simply nothing to what I felt. I moved and lived in a state of despair and self-contempt which I couldn't describe if I would, and I certainly wouldn't if I could. It was like a revelation of the state of the damned. I spurned and despised myself so utterly that I couldn't imagine God would do anything else than spurn and despise me."

"O John!"

"I mean it—every word!" The stern jaw set in a manner which showed that he meant it. "I was plunged into such depths of self-

condemnation that I didn't even try to make a plea for pardon. I felt as if it would be useless. The whole thing had been on my part so deliberate! I knew perfectly what I was doing, and *I had done it!* I was aware that I might have done many worse things with less mental guilt; and it didn't seem to help my condition in the least that I had failed in all I set out to accomplish. I was so abased in spirit that I suppose after a while the divine compassion was moved on my behalf; for a few rays of something like comfort began to steal upon me, as if the corner of a curtain were lifted and I was given a glimpse, the merest glimpse, of what lay behind. I began to see that I had needed just such a lesson to show the depths to which pride and self-will, and the determination to have one's own way at any cost, may lead one; and I also saw (this was most comforting of all) that, although I had not been able to do what I desired for Madeleine—that is, to make her happy in the ordinary way,—I had been permitted to do much more, without any intention, and certainly without any merit of my own. I had made myself her tempter; and by tempting, by every means and argument the devil could suggest, I had tested the strength of her soul. You know how it stood the test."

He paused and looked at his mother with glowing eyes, while she looked at him in a wonder beyond speech; for never in all the

years she had known him, which meant the years since he first drew breath, had she heard him express himself like this. He had always been one of the most reticent of men, where his deepest feelings were concerned; and although he had once before said some words on this subject which she had repeated to Madeleine, they had been brief, and contained no hint of such self-revelation as the present. So for a moment they gazed silently at each other, and then very quietly he went on:

"Well, the point of all this is, that where I might have done deadly harm, I was rendered instead the instrument of good to her. Pain—oh, yes, I gave her pain and bitter suffering. But I don't need to remind you what we are told about the efficacy of those things. The merit she gained through them, the graces they brought her, were not at all what I had wanted to give her; but what I wanted was not only frustrated, but turned about, and made to work another and very different purpose from that which I intended. I saw it all, like a flash of revelation, and it was more wonderful than I can even attempt to express. I saw that, from first to last, I had been no more than a pawn in the game God was playing for her soul. (I hope I'm not irreverent; I don't mean to be.) If I hadn't fallen in love with her and determined to marry her, you wouldn't have known her, and turned her attention toward the Church; and if I hadn't

followed her abroad, and given her so hard a struggle, she mightn't have developed the strength to make the other heroic sacrifice which she made at last. Oh, you may think me presumptuous if you like, but it's all very clear to me! And now—"

"Yes, now?" Mrs. Wynne said, as again he paused, and sat, holding her with his brilliant gaze. "You believe that you will now be allowed to play a different—it's impossible to say a more important—part in her life?"

"I believe," he answered slowly, "that the time has come when I may be permitted to make her happy in the way I desired and intended before. And it is on her account entirely that I believe this. It's as clear to me as to you, or to anybody else, that *I* don't deserve such happiness, but *she* deserves it; and if it can only come to her through me—well, you see the point at last, don't you? What I am counting on is that Providence will use me as an instrument again,—this time to make her happy instead of miserable. And if I am happy also, why, that's merely incidental, and to be tolerated because it's a necessary part of the scheme of her happiness."

"John, you are both absurd and convincing!" his mother declared, between laughter and tears. "I've given a great deal of thought to this matter; but, think as I might, I couldn't see how Madeleine was to be made happy without your being happy also; and I was

forced to confess to myself that you didn't deserve to be."

"Not in the least," Maitland agreed. "But God gives us many things which we don't deserve, and I am hoping that this may be one of them. At all events, I shall not leave the matter in doubt. As soon as I know where she is settled abroad, I shall go to her."

"My dear boy, there are certain conventionalities to be observed. Had you not better wait a little?"

"No." He rose to his feet as if he were starting at once. "I shall not wait a day longer than is necessary. Conventionalities are nothing to me, and I am sure they are nothing to her. The only thing that matters is to find myself once more face to face with her."

CHAPTER XXV.

MADELEINE was sitting in the shadow of the pines on a hill-side overlooking the green valley, in which lay the pretty Alpine town where she had found with Nina the quiet and rest her soul craved. They had been here now for several weeks; and with every day as it passed she had seemed to renew health and vigor, to breathe in the healing balm of the encompassing forests, the divine peace of the austere, majestic heights. And this end was gained the more readily because there were absolutely no demands of any kind made upon her. Nina was an ideal companion in that regard. Having herself the artist's love of isolation, of the quiet necessary for any concentration of thought or purpose, she was able to respect the same desire in another. Above all, she understood Madeleine, recognized her need of a great bath, as it were, of solitude, in which to refresh her spirit, and draw the strength for whatever combats life still held for her; and therefore seldom offered her companionship on the long, solitary rambles in which the other delighted.

It was after such a long ramble—for she had risen at sunrise, and climbed to a little

chapel high among the hills, where she heard Mass in company with a few peasants at a very early hour—that Madeleine was now returning; and, being somewhat tired, had paused to rest. Peace encompassed her like an atmosphere, as she sat on the border of the pine forest, its shade falling over her, its clean, sweet, resinous odors borne on every waft of air. At her feet, stretches of Alpine pasture, set with grass and splashed with myriad flowers, swept downward; while over the rampart of pink-grey crags which formed the outer rim of the cup-shaped valley, peeped the mighty heads of snow-clad mountains, among which towered the pinnacles and spires of Mont Blanc.

Almost as if in a trance, Madeleine had been sitting for some time, with her eyes, like deep wells of light, fastened on those glorious forms, when a sound, or perhaps only an instinct—that curious instinct which often warns us of the approach of friend or foe,—made her gaze drop to the path which, a little below the spot where she sat, wound in its zigzag way from the town in the valley to the heights above.

Along this path a man was now mounting with light, quick steps; and as her glance fell on him, Madeleine drew in her breath sharply, while her hand involuntarily went to her heart. For she recognized him at once: she knew at once that John Maitland had again crossed land and sea to seek and to find her.

And even in the moment that her glance dropped downward, by a subtle magnetism, his lifted upward, and he saw the figure under the pines. He stopped short for a barely perceptible instant; then, turning sharply, left the path, and sprang up the hillside to where she stood—for she had now risen to her feet—with the forest stretching in solemn vistas behind her.

If there was a suggestion in these vistas of the aisles of the great Cathedral where he had seen her last, John Maitland did not think of it. Every thought was absorbed in the sight of her,—of her beauty, which smote him with a new sense of surprise, as if it had gained a greater exquisiteness since his eyes last rested on her; and in the sense of delight which her presence inspired. This delight irradiated his whole expression, so that it appeared to envelop her as he reached her side, and, with glowing, ardent eyes, held out his hand.

"You see I have come!" he said. Then after a moment, as she did not speak, he added: "Of course you knew that I would come."

There was interrogation as well as assertion in his tone, and it was the interrogation which she answered.

"Yes," she said, with the directness which always characterized her utterances, "I thought it likely that you would come after a while, but I did not look for you so soon."

"You might have looked for me," he replied.

"You might have known that I would let nothing keep me from you an hour longer than was necessary—now that you are free. Oh, what happiness it is to know this at last!" he cried passionately. "What happiness it is to see you again—as if it had been but yesterday we parted!"

"Does it seem like yesterday to you?" she asked, a little wonderingly. "To me it seems nearer a lifetime."

"That is because you have suffered so much," he said quickly. "I, too, have suffered horribly, and found the time long in passing; but now I forget it all, and I desire to make you forget it also. For if it had been indeed a lifetime since we parted, it would make no difference to me. All that I felt then, I feel now. I haven't changed in the least—unless to love you more deeply than ever is to change—and I have hoped that I should find you unchanged also. Madeleine, tell me that I am not mistaken,—that you have not changed!"

"And has it never occurred to you to ask how that could be?" she questioned, as her gaze dwelt on him with a look of great kindness, in which compassion clearly mingled. "How could one remain unchanged who had passed through such experiences as I have known? Not a lifetime only, but a whole world of thought and feeling lies between the hour of our parting and this hour in which we meet. Is it possible that you do not feel that?"

Yes, he felt it now. Already in her look, her tone, it was subtly communicated to him that the woman he found was not the woman whom he left on that unforgotten day in Chartres. It was not in vain that she had been brought into contact with the great realities, with the most vital and absorbing things in life; that sacrifice and pain had done their work in her soul; that suffering and death had taught their overwhelming lessons. As she stood before him now, within touch of his hand, he suddenly realized that she had been removed in spirit far beyond his reach, and that there was between them a gulf of difference which Hope itself was powerless to cross.

It was said of John Maitland on an earlier page that, like too many Catholics of his time and country, he was essentially lacking in spiritual perception; but the experience through which he had passed, and which he but slightly indicated in his conversation with his mother, had done much to waken the dormant faculties of his soul; and, being awakened, they now told him that Madeleine had entered a region where he could not follow her,—where even love as intense as his must pause as on the threshold of a sanctuary. Words of explanation are unnecessary when soul is laid bare to soul in such an illumination; and so when he spoke it was only to say:

"I have been a fool—a mad, presumptuous

fool—not to foresee this. I might have known that you would go far beyond me."

"No, no!" she told him eagerly. "You have been neither mad nor presumptuous. It was only that you did not understand. For it is not so much that I have gone beyond you as that I have been shown a way which I must follow, different from the way of which we both once dreamed, and of which you are dreaming still. You have perhaps heard a little about my life since we parted—"

"I have heard all that there was to hear."

"Then some knowledge may have reached you of the wonderful miracle which was wrought in a soul that God seemed to give into my hands in answer to my prayer. Ah, you do not know—I can never tell you" (a light from the inner recesses of the spirit seemed suddenly to flash into her face, filling it with radiance) "what things I have seen and felt, what consolations have been given me! I can do nothing less than spend my life in thanking God for them. I should feel *that*, even if I had not made a promise,—if I had not offered myself wholly and absolutely when I begged the great favor of which I have spoken. I thought of such an offering as a sacrifice then; but now I know that, if accepted, it is the greatest privilege and reward which God can give to a soul while it is still on earth."

There was a pause,—a pause in which John Maitland was dimly conscious of the sunshine

falling upon him, of the wide, Alpine scene around, of the song of a bird falling from the blue sky above, as a man who has received a death sentence might be conscious of these things. Then he put out his hand again.

"Good-bye!" he said.

But she caught the hand and held it in the detaining clasp of her own.

"No, no!" she cried again. "You must not go away like this. I can not forgive myself for allowing you to come! I only waited to be sure—not of myself, but of certain other things—before I let you know that to do so would be useless. I see now that I waited too long. I did not reckon sufficiently on your impetuosity."

"You did not reckon sufficiently on my love," he said in a voice sharp with pain.

"There you are mistaken," she replied. "I have never failed for one moment to reckon on your love, and I am reckoning on it now to rise to a great height. Shall I tell you what it is?'

He looked at her, feeling as if under the beauty and tenderness of her gaze his heart would break.

"Yes, tell me," he said; "but don't reckon on too much. There is in me no capacity for rising to great heights."

"Ah, there again you are mistaken!" she said in a thrilling tone. "I am sure that there is in you the capacity to rise to greater heights than you have yet dreamed of."

"With your help perhaps I might," he said. "You have power to leaven the dullest mass of earthly clay—and God knows I am dull and earthly enough!—but without you, what can I do?"

"What have you done without me during the last two years?" she asked. "It was not I who helped you to rise, as you must feel that you have risen in that time, to greater effort, to higher spiritual points of view."

"And if not you, who then?" he demanded. "Are you so blind as not to know that you alone have helped me? What should I have been made of if, loving you as I did, I had learned nothing from the lesson you taught when you refused to let my passion drag us both down to things of which I shudder now to think? And surely I must have been a more recreant Catholic, a far worse man than I am, if your heroic sacrifice for one who had so deeply wronged you had not struck me to the soul. Don't you understand yet that you saved *me* as much as you saved that other man who is gone? It is incredible that you should need to be told all this. I have never imagined that you did not know. I have felt so close to you, so keenly aware of your spiritual presence even in my darkest hours, that I can not realize that you have been ignorant of the influence you were exerting."

"I have thought of and prayed for you constantly," she said; "but I did not know, I

could never have dreamed, of anything so wonderful, so consoling as what you tell me." She paused for a moment, as if indeed lost in wonder over it; then, turning on him a look he never forgot, she cried: "Oh, don't you see that I can do nothing less than spend my life in thanking God for all He has done for me, and all He has enabled me to do to help and save others?"

"And do you think you have come to the end of your power to help and save?" he asked. "On the contrary, what you have done for me is but the beginning of what you may yet do, if you will. The man who deserved so little from you and for whom you did so much is safe now; but I—am I to be left to struggle alone with the world, the flesh, and the devil?"

"Alone!" she repeated. "Do you fancy that in such struggle you will be alone?"

"But I want you—*you!*" he cried, passionately. "As I have already said, with you I might gain the spiritual heights of which you have spoken, but without you they are impossible to me."

"You will not find them impossible," she told him. "I am quite sure of that; and, to prove it, I am going to show you the height to which I now ask you to rise. You have understood my decision with regard to my future life. Well, I beg you not merely to accept that decision, but to join in it."

"What!" He stared at her as if she were

mad. "You want me to join in the sacrifice you intend to make of yourself, of your youth, your beauty, your sweetness, your power to bless and brighten existence for others? You ask too much, Madeleine. I am not a saint."

"Neither am I," she replied. "But because we are not saints, you and I, is there not the more need for sacrifice on our part? I do not wish to pain you, but can we forget that we have forfeited all right to the happiness we once came near to grasping in defiance of God's law—"

"*I* came near it, but not you," he interrupted. "It may be true that *I* have forfeited all right to the happiness I tried to seize, but you have forfeited nothing; instead, everything that is good is due to you, and I have hoped that for your sake God might permit me to give you the happiness which you once desired—whether you desire it now or not."

His tone lent a poignant sadness to the last words which made Madeleine turn her gaze to the distant, shining pinnacles of Mont Blanc, as if to the eternal hills, "from whence cometh help." Then she answered gently:

"No, I do not desire it now. You must forgive me that I say this. I still see how sweet such happiness might be; but a glimpse of a higher happiness has been given me, and I could not turn to the other if I would. Yet I am so sure of the need for sacrifice to expiate wrongdoing, that I almost wish it cost me more

to follow the way clearly marked out for me. And it is because I feel this need so deeply that I beg you to join with me in offering my life to God in holy religion."

Her voice had taken an accent of intense pleading; but Maitland stood immovable, his face set, his eyes downcast. He did not speak, but only shook his head. Then she drew nearer to him by a step, and laid her hand on his arm.

"John," she said, "you have spoken of your love, and you have indicated what its transforming power in your life has been. It was strong enough to turn you once toward evil, and now you must make amends for that by turning it toward good,—by yielding to God the desire of your heart. For only so will you find peace and happiness; and I can not tell you how much I desire that such peace and happiness may be yours. Don't you understand that it will come near to breaking my heart if you leave me as you did before, in pain and bitterness?"

"In pain it must be," he said; "but not in bitterness,—never again in bitterness. If God calls you, what can I do but stand aside and see you go? But you must not ask me to be willing to do so. That is impossible."

"It is not impossible," she said again; "and it is what I *do* ask. And remember that it is the last thing I shall ever ask of you—except your prayers."

"Madeleine, Madeleine, you are merciless to me!"

"No, dear friend" (and her voice was like sweetest music now), "I am not merciless. It is because I feel in my inmost heart what you can do that I am so insistent upon your doing it. Think! You came to give me one kind of happiness, and you find *that* out of your power; but, as if in recompense, the chance is offered you to give me another—the greatest, the most exquisite possible; and a happiness which you alone, of all the people on earth, can give me. Is not that a great thing? You will have a part in all that I do in my life in the cloister. You will remember always that you gave me a fragrant memory to carry with me when I went away from the world where for a little while we walked together. And when life goes hardly with you, and the ceaseless struggle with evil tries heart and strength, you will say to yourself, 'I have made an offering to God which He will not forget.' And you may add always, 'Madeleine is praying—'"

"Stop! stop!—for God's sake, stop!"

To her amazement and almost to her dismay, he suddenly fell upon his knees at her feet, and buried his face in his hands. Again there was a moment of intense silence, in which the sunlight shone upon the two motionless figures, the pines breathed their resinous odors over them, and a bird again lifted its voice in

thrilling song out of the sky. At length John Maitland lifted his face, and met the anxious gaze bent upon him.

"You can ask me for nothing, in my power to give, which I can refuse," he said. "Take what you desire, then. It is like you to desire it,—like you to allow me a part in such an offering, and as your last gift to lift me to a height I could never have reached without you. So God's will—and your will—be done!"

"They are the same," she breathed softly, while in the flooding rapture of her eyes he saw the light of no earthly vision.